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Potassium (0.4%)
Sulphur (0.3%)
Sodium (0.2%)
Chlorine (0.2%)
Magnesium (0.1%)
WHERE THERE'S TEA THERE'S HOPE
BLESSED ARE THE CHEESEMAKERS
"The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt."
Bertrand Russell
DARWIN
LUNAR MODULE
BELIEVE IN ~~GOD~~ yourself
MY IMAGINARY FRIEND IS BETTER THAN YOURS
"IT IS DANGEROUS TO BE RIGHT IN MATTERS ON WHICH THE ESTABLISHED AUTHORITIES ARE WRONG"
VOLTAIRE
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42 IN THE LAND OF THE CHANEQUES

When **CHRIS POLLARD** first moved to Veracruz State he was a confirmed sceptic. Since then, odd experiences and tales of close encounters with Mexico's little people have left him wondering whether the stone-throwing, trick-playing, child-stealing fairy-folk might be more real than he'd ever imagined...

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Fortean Times

EDITOR
DAVID SUTTON
(drsutton@forteantimes.com)
FOUNDING EDITORS
BOB RICKARD (bobrickard@mail.com)
PAUL SIEVEKING (sieveking@forteantimes.com)
ART DIRECTOR
ETIENNE GILFILLAN
(etienne@forteantimes.com)
BOOK REVIEWS EDITOR
VAL STEVENSON
(val@forteantimes.com)
RESIDENT CARTOONIST
HUNT EMERSON

SUBSCRIPTION ENQUIRIES AND BACK ISSUES
www.subsinfo.co.uk
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LICENSING & SYNDICATION
FORTEAN TIMES IS AVAILABLE FOR INTERNATIONAL LICENSING AND SYNDICATION – CONTACT:
Syndication Senior Manager
ANJ DOSAJ-HALAI TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6132
Anj_Dosaj-Halai@dennis.co.uk
Licensing Manager
CARLOTTA SERANTONI TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6550
Carlotta_Serantoni@dennis.co.uk
Licensing & Syndication Assistant
NICOLE ADAMS TEL: +44- (0) 20 7907 6134
Nicole_Adams@dennis.co.uk

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CIRCULATION MANAGER
JAMES MANGAN
james.mangan@
seymour.co.uk

EXPORT CIRCULATION MANAGER
GERALDINE GROBLER
geraldine.grobler@
seymour.co.uk

PRODUCTION EXECUTIVE
LAWRENCE BROOKES
020 7907 6062
lawrence_brookes@
dennis.co.uk

ADVERTISING DIRECTOR
STEVE NICOLAOU
020 7907 6633
steve_nicolaou@
dennis.co.uk

SALES EXECUTIVE
BRADLEY BEAVER
020 7907 6701
bradley_beaver@
dennis.co.uk

SALES EXECUTIVE
IMOGEN WILLIAMS
020 7907 6247
imogen_williams@
dennis.co.uk

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editorial

No normal

SOPHIE CELEBRATED

A couple of issues ago (**FT337:2**) we joked about how You Gov's online consumer research revealed that we forteans are "all a bit weird". Which is all very well between friends; but it can be an entirely different matter when someone else sees themselves as 'normal' and passes judgement on those perceived to be 'weirdos'. Most of us will recall the appalling fate that befell 20-year-old Sophie Lancaster, (pictured at right) who was kicked and beaten to death by a gang of vicious teenage thugs in a Lancashire park for choosing to look 'different' and dressing in Gothic fashion.

Reader Rose Titus has asked us to inform fellow forteans about a new project: in May, a book called *Dare to Shine* will be published, 100 per cent of the profits from which will go to benefit the Sophie Lancaster Foundation (www.sophielancasterfoundation.com/), the charity set up to combat prejudice and intolerence in the wake of Sophie's tragic, untimely death. An anthology of stories across a number of genres, but each celebrating individuality, the paperback and ebook will be released on 22 May 2016 – World Goth Day. More info at http://daretoshine.weebly.com/. We weirdos and freaks need to stick together, so do give the project your support.

SOPHIE LANCASTER FOUNDATION

AARON RAMSEY STRIKES AGAIN!

Last year, (**FT325:53-55**), Rob Gandy examined the supposed football 'curse' which means that whenever Arsenal player Aaron Ramsey scores a goal, a celebrity snuffs it shortly afterwards. The death of Robin Williams in these circumstances made headlines last August as the actor was added to a list of victims including Osama bin Laden, Col Gadaffi and Steve Jobs. Recently, it seems, the 'kick of death' has struck again, repeatedly and in rapid succession, taking out David Bowie and Alan Rickman in a matter of days and then felling First Lady Nancy Reagan. Bowie died on the evening of 9 January, a day after Ramsey had scored against Sunderland, while Rickman was taken out later the same week following another Ramsey goal, this time in a 3-3 draw with Liverpool. Mrs Reagan – who, at 94, had probably gone into extra time anyway – passed away just 24 hours after football's Grim Reaper scored the opener against Tottenham in the North London Derby.

Bookies have sniffed an opportunity here, and a betting and gaming website in the UK is now offering odds for the public to bet on which celebrities – from a preselected list – will die within 72 hours of an Aaron Ramsey goal. You can put your money on the likes of Donald Trump, Piers Morgan or Katie Hopkins at www.wincashlive.com/event/games/675912. They have also sponsored a microsite (www.RamseysRampage.co.uk), where you can follow the player's continuing deadly exploits. We were amused by their admission that: "Ramsey has of course scored lots of goals where absolutely no celebrities have died but we have decided to follow the reporting methods of *The Daily Mail* and ignore contradictory evidence that doesn't directly support our agenda."

ERRATA

FT336:54: Due to a design error, Steven Tucker's Strange Statesmen entry on Papa Doc Duvalier had shed its last three footnotes before going to press. They were as follows:
13. http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,876967,00.html. In spite of linking himself with Christ, Duvalier expelled many Catholic clergy (he put one Archbishop on a plane to Miami in full ceremonial regalia and with only a dollar to his name) and was excommunicated by the Pope after encouraging Vodou worship amongst his people instead of Christianity.
14. Mambo Chita Tann, Haitian Voodoo, Lewellyn Worldwide, 2012, p40.
15. http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/01/17/us-haiti-duvalier-witness-idustre70G43M20110117.

FT338:56: We forgot to provide the back reference for Merrily Harpur's suggestion that many Alien Big Cats might be daimonic rather than flesh-and-blood creatures, leaving readers with only a string of asterisks. The relevant passage can be found in **FT224:39**.

FT338:72: The cartoon in the letters pages was attributed incorrectly to Paul Taylor; it was, of course, by Carol Isaacs.

DAVID R SUTTON

BOB RICKARD

Paul Sieveking
PAUL SIEVEKING

Why fortean?
Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!
SEE PAGE 78

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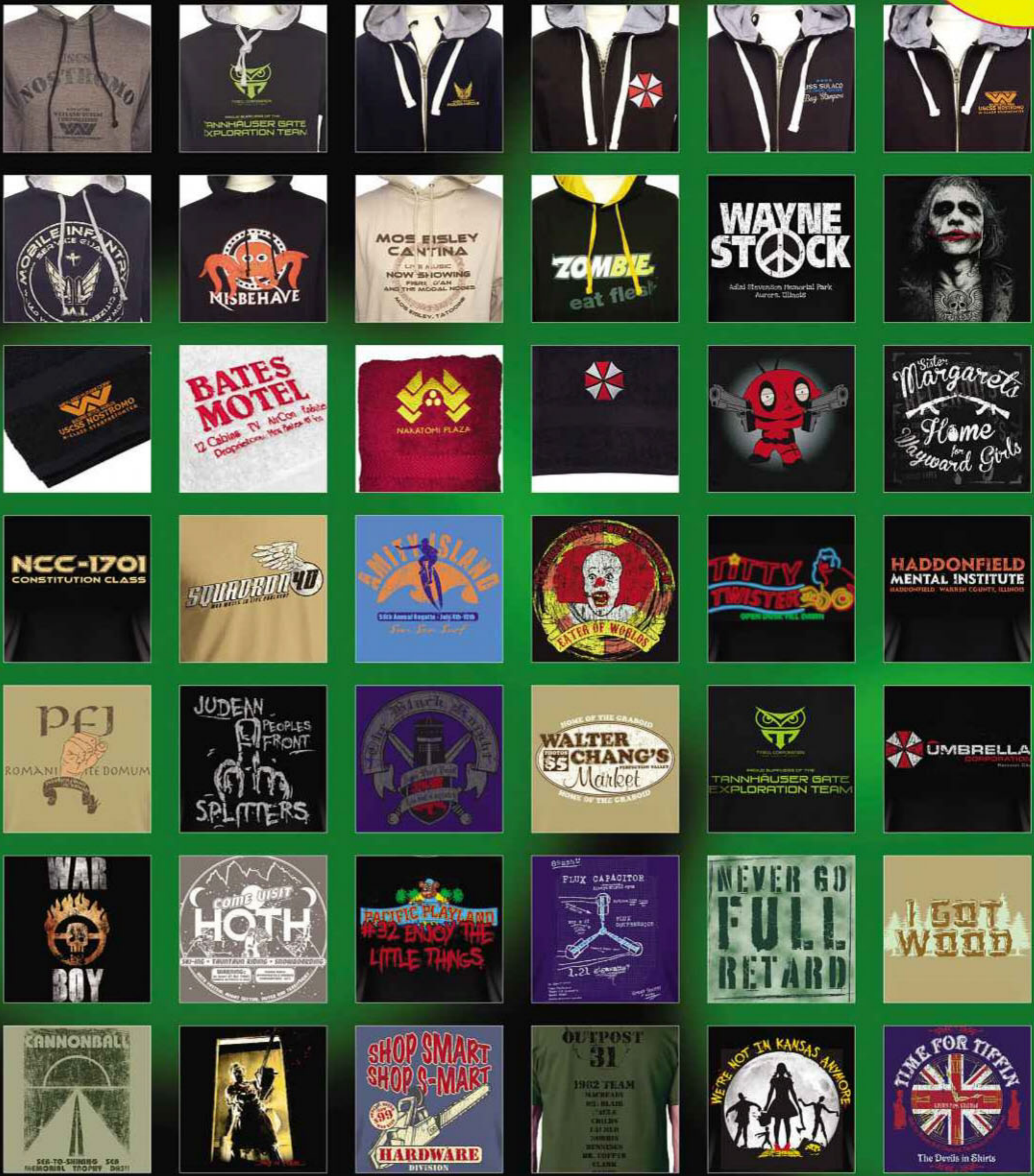
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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

strangedays

Joao and Dindim: a love story

A beautiful relationship has blossomed between a retired bricklayer and a Magellanic penguin

ABOVE: Joao Pereira de Souza and Dindim spend eight months of every year together: "I love the penguin as if he's my own child and I believe he loves me".

Joao Pereira de Souza, 71, from an island village just outside Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, discovered a tiny penguin languishing on rocks at his local beach in 2011. The South American Magellanic penguin was starving and covered in oil, but Joao – a retired bricklayer and part-time fisherman – took him in and nursed him back to health, naming him Dindim. It took a week just to clean the oil off his feathers in the shower.

When released Dindim back into the sea, he never expected to see him again, but a few months later, he returned to the island where he recognised Joao and returned to his shanty with him. Now, Dindim spends eight months of the year with his human friend and the rest of his time breeding off the Patagonia coast of Argentina and Chile. He is believed to swim from 3,000 to 5,000 miles (4,800-8,000km) every time he returns. "I love the penguin as if he's my own child and I believe he loves me," said Joao in an interview with *Globo TV*, in which the bird honks with delight as he recognises his human friend. "No one else is allowed to touch him. He pecks them if they do. He lies on my lap, lets me give him showers, allows me to feed him sardines and to pick him up."

Dindim swims up to 5,000 miles every time he returns

Joao fed Dindim fish before taking him back to the sea; "but he wouldn't leave. He stayed with me for 11 months and then just after he changed his coat with new feathers he disappeared. Everyone said he wouldn't return, but he has been coming back to visit me for the past four years. He arrives in June and leaves to go home in February and every year he becomes more affectionate as he appears even happier to see me." Biologist Joao Paulo Krajewski, who interviewed de Souza for *Globo TV*, said: "I have never seen anything like this before. I think the penguin believes Joao is part of his family and probably a penguin as well. When he sees him he wags his tail like a dog and honks with delight."

Penguins live for about 25 years and are known for their loyalty to their mates, staying with the same partner until they die. However, environmentalists warn that, while hundreds of the Magellanic species are known to migrate thousands of miles north in search of food, there has been a worrying rise in the number of marine creatures washing up on Brazil's beaches. Between 2010 and 2013, the Humpback Whale Institute in Bahia recorded more than 180 cases of mammals stranded along the Brazilian coast.

Professor David Zee, an oceanographer from Rio de Janeiro's State University, said the increase is due in part to global climatic changes. "Every year the strong ocean currents from the Falkland region traps and brings many species of seals, whales, dolphins, turtles and penguins to the Brazilian coast," he said. "This is becoming more problematic due to environmental changes and the increasing frequency of el Niño, in which the Pacific Ocean is warming up for prolonged periods of time. The marine creatures get confused and lost as they are dragged away on the surf from their normal habitat and end up in areas where they are unable to survive." Prof Zee added sea animals face "increased danger with the ongoing contamination of the oceans with oil and other derivatives" spilled by oil tankers.

Luckily the ending for Joao and Dindim has been a happy one, even though it is illegal in Brazil to keep wild animals as pets. "Professionals who work with animals try to avoid relationships like this occurring so they are able to reintroduce the animal into the wild," said Prof Krajewski. "But in this isolated case the authorities allowed Dindim to stay with Joao because of his kindness." The fisherman commented: "I'm flattered Dindim is happy to exchange his home with thousands of other penguins every year to find his way here to spend one-to-one time with me. It's a very special relationship." *Independent (online), 7 Mar; D.Mail (online), 8 Mar' D/Telegraph, 9 Mar 2016.*

BORING FOR BRITAIN
The nation's dullest men celebrate their strange passions
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A NOSE FOR TROUBLE
The dogs, cats and horses that sniff out illness in their humans
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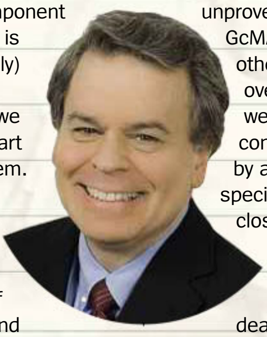
ABDOMINAL SHOWMAN
Saying goodbye to the eccentric Godfather of Gut Barging...
PAGE 24

The Conspirasphere

Is Big Pharma going to extreme lengths to protect its profits as controversial medics threaten to spill the beans? NOEL ROONEY tracks the dead doctors...

In June 2015, Dr Jeffrey Bradstreet, an 'alternative autism specialist' (this clumsy epithet is used in various online sources, but I'm sure you get its drift) was visited by a posse of law enforcement and FDA (the US Food and Drugs Agency) agents. They had a search warrant, and were looking for a substance called GcMAF, and records pertaining to its production and use. The day after the raid, Dr Bradstreet's body was found in woods a few hours' drive from his home with gunshot wounds to the chest; his death was reported as suicide.



GcMAF (Group Specific Component Macrophage Activating Factor) is not a drug, nor is it (necessarily) a weirdy-beardy alternative concoction; it is a substance we all produce in our bodies as part of our immune response system. Some alternative practitioners suggested it was useful in the treatment of both autism and cancer. Dr Bradstreet was a proponent of its use in autism treatment, and had indicated in a speech shortly before his untimely death that he was about to make a major announcement in connection with GcMAF.

Dr Nicholas Gonzales (above) died in July 2015. Gonzales was a well-known practitioner of the Gerson method for cancer patients, particularly pancreatic cancer patients. He apparently died of a heart attack, although he was reported to be in excellent health at the time of his death. He was also reportedly about to go public with something big.

What links these two doctors in the Conspirasphere is an enzyme called 'nagalase' (alpha-N-acetylgalactosaminidase, if you insist). Nagalase inhibits GcMAF; it is often found at raised levels in cancer patients (in fact, it can be used as an early diagnostic tool according to some sources), and also in people suffering from autism. The rumour mill is buzzing with speculation that nagalase is produced by a range of vaccines, and that Drs Bradstreet and Gonzales were about to spill the beans on a dark pharmaceutical conspiracy.

In addition, some online commentators have linked these two deaths to the deaths of a number of alternative practitioners (five more are mentioned in various articles) around the same time. So as well as trying to kill us with vaccines, Big Pharma, or its shills in the FDA, are out there offing anyone who tries to speak out against the eugenic conspiracy.

On the other hand: GcMAF is clinically unproven. The factory that produced GcMAF for Dr Bradstreet and others was recently closed down over fears that its products were unsafe, and possibly contaminated. A Swiss clinic run by an associate of Dr Bradstreet specialising in the treatment was closed down after a number of patients died there. News of the Swiss clinic affair aired only hours before Bradstreet's death. His career was on a precipice; he was potentially facing jail time for his controversial activities.

I looked at some social media and online stuff from parents of autistic children who had tried the GcMAF treatment: a small number claimed their children were cured; a larger number complained they had spent a lot of money and nothing had happened, or their children had become ill.

So maybe there are two conspiracies here.

http://healthimpactnews.com/2015/is-the-u-s-medical-mafia-murdering-alternative-health-doctors-who-have-real-cures-not-approved-by-the-fda/
www.sciencebasedmedicine.org/tag/nagalase/
http://gcmaf.timsmithmd.com/book/chapter/52/
https://randrewohge.wordpress.com/2015/07/29/nagalase-molecule-found-in-most-vaccines-spurs-cancer-growth-reason-for-vaccine-push/

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

Let girls climb trees 'to boost their job chances'

D.Mail, 18 Feb 2015.

MP Lim slams sham monk scam

(Melbourne) Herald-Sun, 26 Jan 2015.

President of Argentina adopts Jewish godson to 'stop him turning into a werewolf'

Independent, 29 Dec 2014.

Man on potato peeler charge

Western Gazette, 12 Mar 2015.

McDONALD'S CUSTOMER FINDS 'SOUL OF THE DAMNED' IN ICE CREAM SUNDAE

Metro, 12 Jan 2015.

Importer hires new face

Hull Daily Mail, 2 Feb 2015.

Salmon sperm 'key ingredient for recycling smartphones'

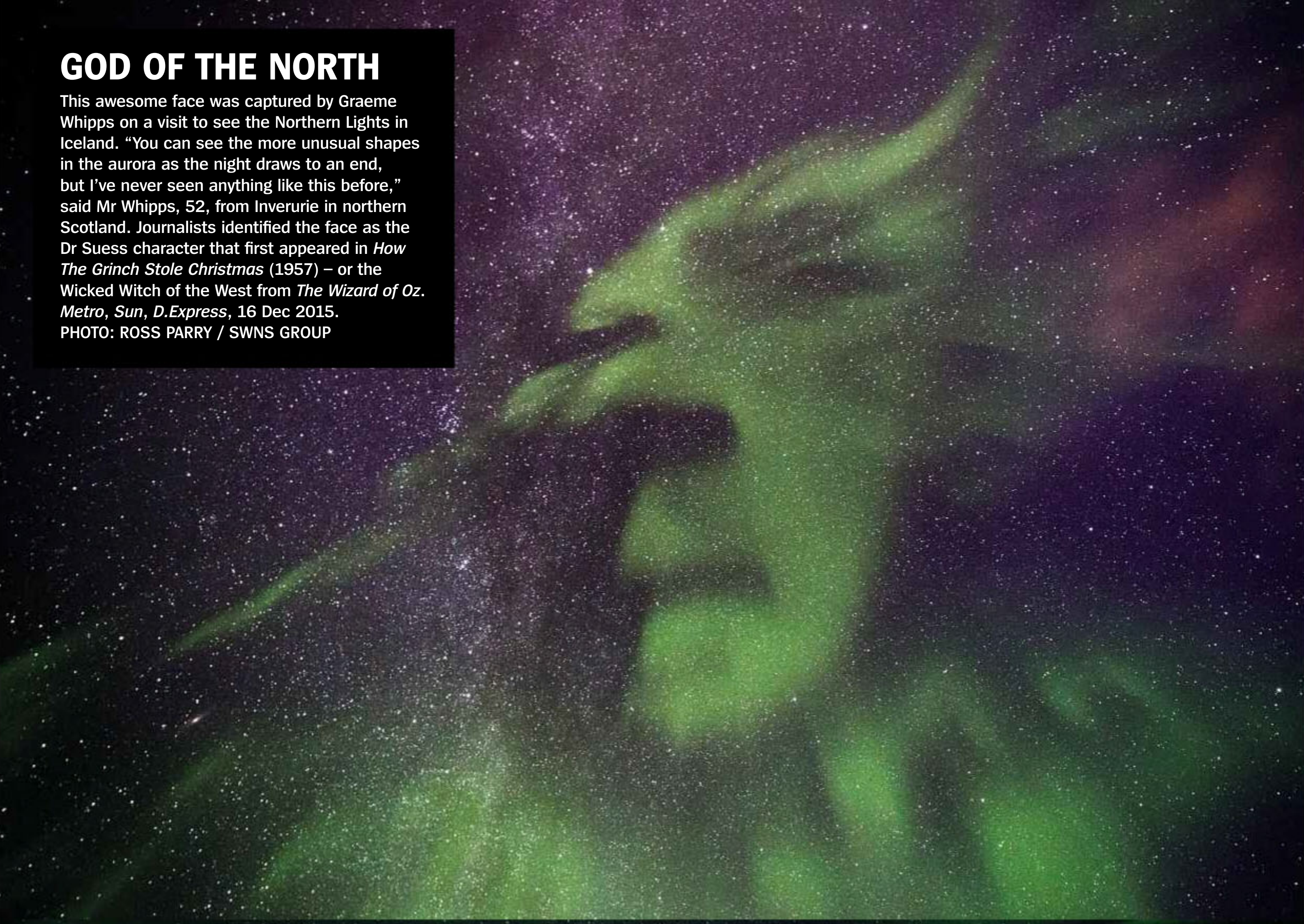
International Business News, 16 Jan 2015.

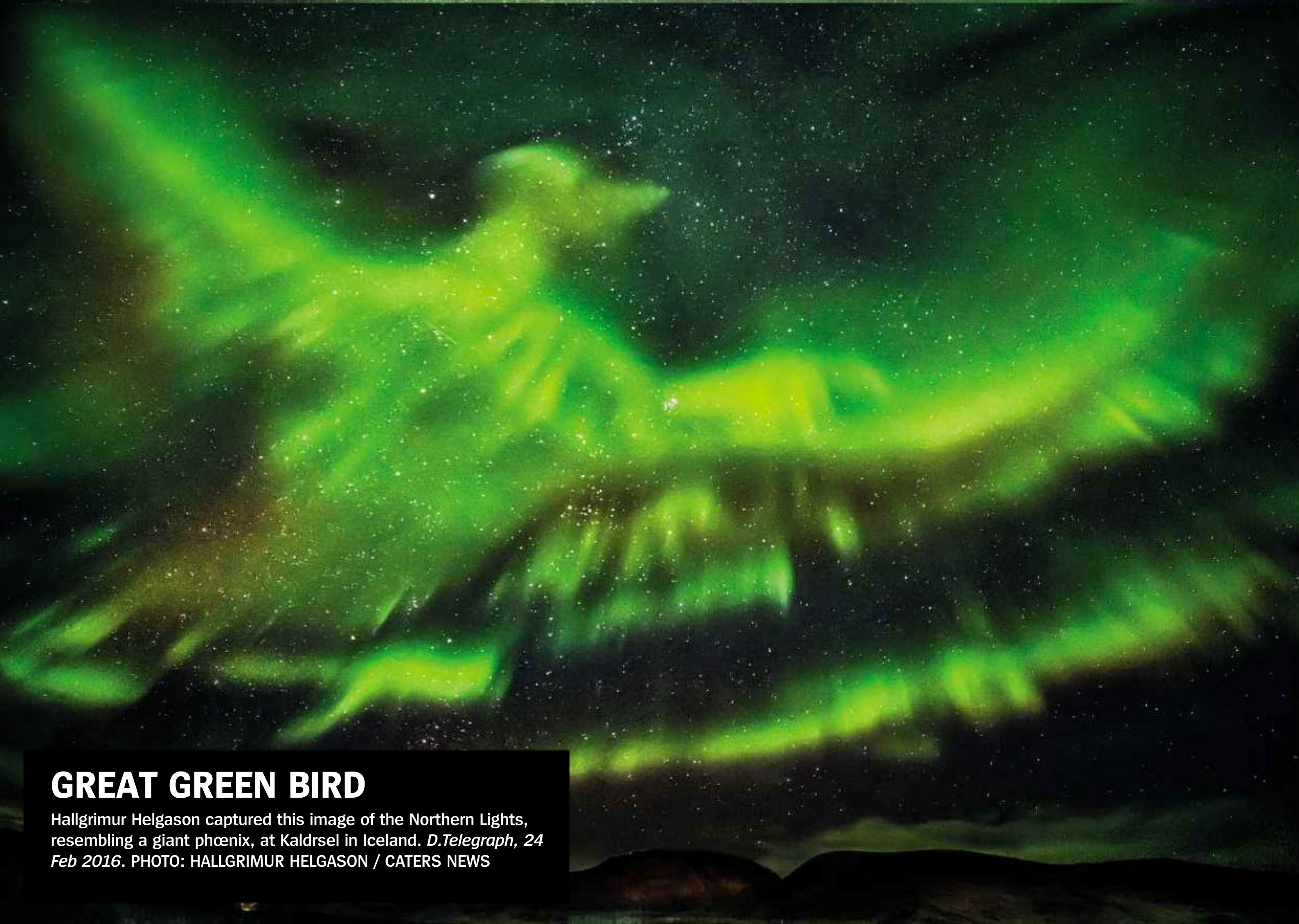
Rampaging tortoises cause havoc on set of new film

Irish Independent, 30 Dec 2014.

GOD OF THE NORTH

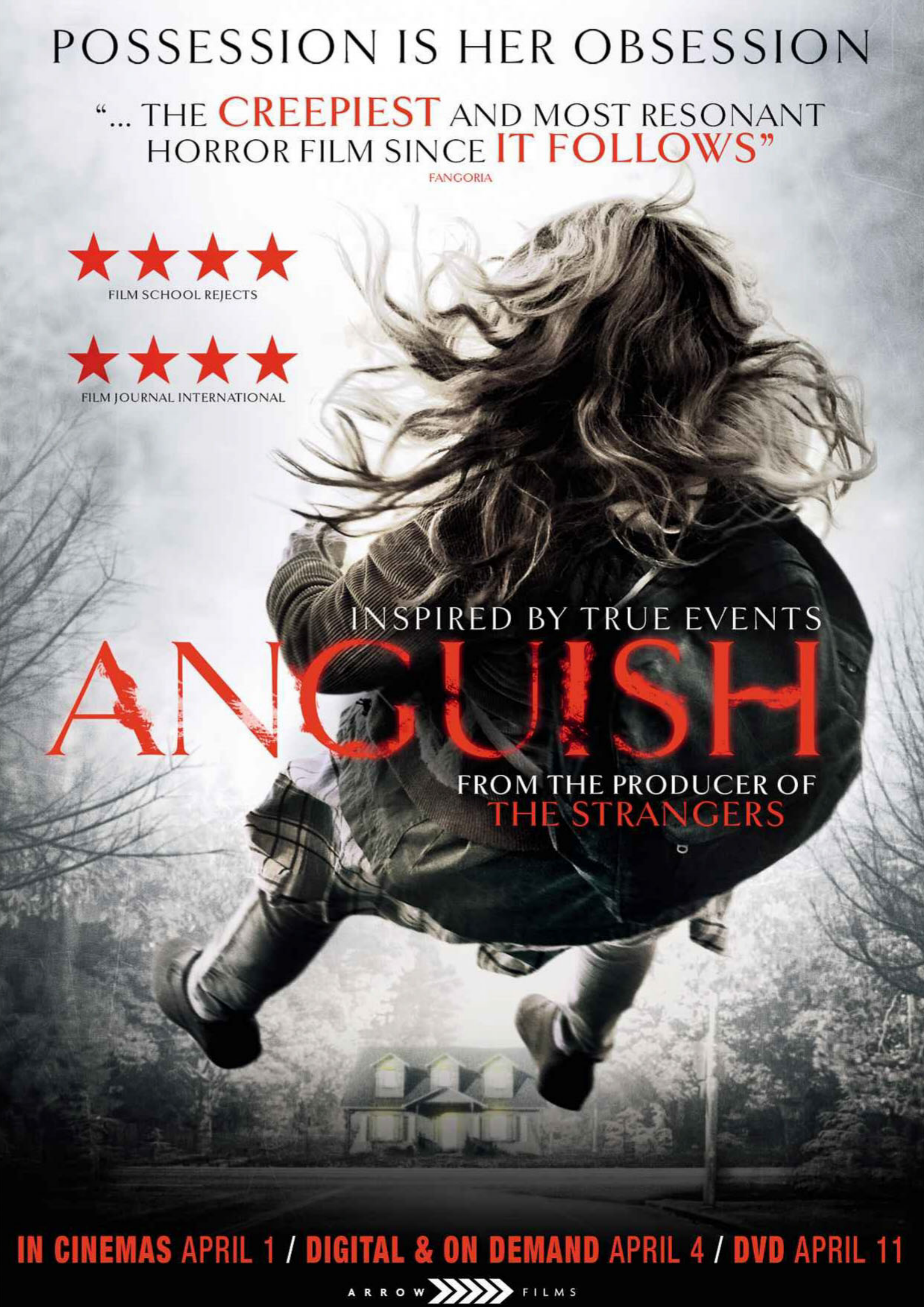
This awesome face was captured by Graeme Whipps on a visit to see the Northern Lights in Iceland. "You can see the more unusual shapes in the aurora as the night draws to an end, but I've never seen anything like this before," said Mr Whipps, 52, from Inverurie in northern Scotland. Journalists identified the face as the Dr Suess character that first appeared in *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* (1957) – or the Wicked Witch of the West from *The Wizard of Oz*. *Metro*, *Sun*, *D.Express*, 16 Dec 2015.
PHOTO: ROSS PARRY / SWNS GROUP





GREAT GREEN BIRD

Hallgrimur Helgason captured this image of the Northern Lights, resembling a giant phœnix, at Kaldrsel in Iceland. *D.Telegraph, 24 Feb 2016*. PHOTO: HALLGRIMUR HELGASON / CATERS NEWS



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ARROW FILMS

Never being boring...

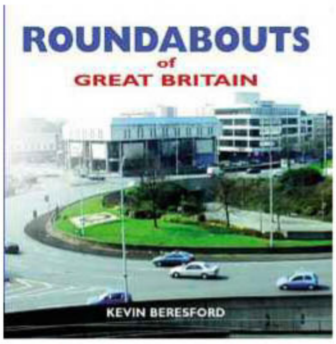
From traffic cones to milk bottles: is dull the new exciting?

GEOFF ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHY

ABOVE: David Morgan has a collection of over 500 traffic cones. **BELOW:** Roundabouts can inspire similar passion in devotees.

The Dull Men's Club has more than 5,000 members. Its 2014 calendar flagged some of the unmissable events of 2015, including the World Snail Racing championships in Congham, Norfolk, the Marmalade Festival in Dalemain, Cumbria, and the World Stone Skimming championships on Easdale Island, Argyll. Last year saw the publication of *Dull Men of Great Britain: Celebrating the Ordinary* (Ebery Press, £8.99). Among many others, the book features: Keith Jackson, who watches paint dry for a living; John Richards, founder of the Apostrophe Protection Society; experts on bandstands, drain covers, park benches, post boxes, roundabouts, and queue dynamics; collectors of bricks, beer cans, cuckoo clocks, handsaws, golf balls, vacuum cleaners, and tax discs.

Steve Wheeler, 67, from Malvern in Worcestershire, has spent 30 years collecting more than 20,000 milk bottles. He found his first bottle in the mid-Eighties and now houses them in an 80ft (24m) museum in his garden. "I have people come to visit my collection from all over the world and I'm about to expand my museum by another 24 feet [7.3m]. Ironically I don't even like milk. I've always thought of it as baby food. But I do love glass. It's not only the bottles I love. It's the thrill of finding them and the people I meet while I'm collecting them."



David Morgan, 73, from the Cotswolds, has the world's largest traffic cone collection. He began collecting in 1986 and now has more than 500 around the house, including a Malaysian cone he found washed up on a beach in Sicily and a 1956 Lynvale rubber cone from Scotland. "I carry traffic cones with me in the car and if I see a rare one I ask if I can swap it," he said.

Stan Hardwick, a lawnmower collector from Filey in Yorkshire, is nicknamed The Lawn Ranger. He has a big enough collection to use a different mower each day of the year and keeps his favourite in the lounge. David Grisenthwaite of Kirkaldy, Scotland, has made a diary entry each time he has mown his lawn since 1984. His methodical record turns out to be invaluable for studies of global warming, though this was obviously unintentional. Although the time spent mowing varies year by year, the diary clearly shows that the average

SIDELINES...

NO, NOT DEAD!

A cranefly believed to be globally extinct was found alive and well after it flew through a car window and landed on the hand of the astonished British entomologist sent to look for it. Liz Fowler of Bugs on the Brink travelled to St Helena in the South Atlantic to count species and complete a new invertebrate guide. The Basilewsky's cranefly had not been seen for 45 years. *D.Telegraph, 4 Feb 2016*.

ANAL RETENTIVE

Former Apple worker Robert Kummer, 37, a German who had lived in Ireland since 2009, was jailed for a year for causing £12,000 worth of damage to a luxury flat in Fitton Street, Cork city, by storing his fæces and urine in bottles, bags and boxes around the property for more than three months. The pong was so noxious that firefighters had to use breathing apparatus. All the floorboards had to be ripped up and replaced. *Irish Independent, 27 Nov 2015*.

BATTLE SNAKE FOUND

The snake the ancient Greeks used to throw at their enemies during sea battles to create panic has been rediscovered in Western Europe. The javelin sand boa (*Eryx jaculus*) had not been officially recorded anywhere in Italy for 80 years, but it has now been sighted at Licata on the south coast of Sicily, according to *Acta Herpetologica*. The snake grows to just 20in (50cm), and feeds on lizards, mice and snails. *D.Mail, 2 Jan 2016*.

MARTIN ROSS

Welcome to
DULL
Paired with
Boring, Oregon, USA
Drive Safely
Highland
Safaris

ABOVE: Dull, Perthshire, and Boring, Oregon – sharing what makes them special. **BELOW**: Peter Willis – on an epic mission to photograph every postbox in Britain.

Bandstands, drain covers, benches, post boxes, tax discs

annual lawn-mowing period has increased by a month and a half in 31 years of recorded mowings.

As a certain 'Dr Coulson' points out in the Foreword to *Dull Men of Great Britain*, "we tend to believe that the fast pace of life is a good thing, that boredom strikes when things remain the same." However, in reality, "The proliferation of choices offered to us, from cars to smartphones, from partners to what to watch on TV, actually paralyses us, leaving us miserable and filled with regret. The commoditisation [sic] of happiness is the greatest confidence trick ever played on our species… the mundane contains much that is beautiful and fascinating." The commodification of happiness sounds very much like the situationist view of leisure: that the all-pervasive spectacle stifles creativity and reduces us to passive consumers.

Kevin Beresford, 62, of Redditch, Worcestershire, developed a cult following for his 'dull' calendars, including 'Fast Disappearing Red Telephone Boxes of Wales' in 2014 and 'Roundabouts of Great Britain 2012' – so he had high hopes for 'Post Boxes of Wales 2016'. However, by last October, he had not sold a single calendar. "I know it's not the subject matter," he said, "because my crimson cuties look absolutely adorable in their Welsh settings." As his previous calendar also featured Welsh post boxes, it might be that his clientele had been overcome with ennui after all.

Collecting obscure data is sometimes viewed (quite erroneously) as a dull activity.

GEOFF ROBINSON PHOTOGRAPHY

Did you know, for instance, that duelling is legal in Paraguay provided both parties are registered blood donors? Or that beetles taste like apples, wasps like pine nuts and worms like fried bacon? Charles Saatchi, the art patron, provides us with this riveting information, and also recommends the Antique Poison Bottle Collectors Association, telling us to "sign up at APBCA for its thrice-yearly newsletter".

Somehow the Gang of Fort missed the annual Boring Conference, devoted to an acceptance of the mundane, that took place at the Conway Hall in London in May 2014 and May 2015 – although we clocked the event in 2011, which culminated in a discussion of vending machines and concrete overpasses [**FT290:6**]. Topics covered in 2014 included domestic inkjet printers c.1999; ice cream van chimes; pothole gardening, how to cook elaborate meals with the equipment found in hotel bedrooms, similarities between 198 of the world's national anthems, and Comic Sans. The presentation on the latter was by the inventor of the typeface himself (which risked being a tad exciting). *1238kmh.com, 26 May; D.Telegraph, D.Mirror, 3 Oct 2014; D.Express, 30 Sept; D.Mail, 14 Oct 2015.*

For more on dull chic, see **FT74:18, 137:23,** and for further eccentric collectors, **FT265:18-19, 268:22, 277:24-25, 279:22.**

SIDELINES…

STEAMING RACCOONS

Irishman Brendan O'Sullivan and his wife were walking their daughter's two small dogs in the Richmond District of San Francisco in late October when they were rushed by about 15 raccoons. "Four vicious big raccoons were actually doing the fighting," said O'Sullivan. The dogs sustained injuries and the wife had to receive a rabies shot. In August, a similar incident was reported when another couple and their dog were attacked in the same neighbourhood. *irishcentral.com, 1 Nov 2015.*

BLOOD WILL OUT

Two orphaned half-sisters, separated as children in South Korea in the 1970s and adopted by different American families, were reunited in their 40s after they both ended up working on the fourth floor of a hospital in Sarasota, Florida. Holly Hoyle O'Brien (Pok-nam Shin) grew up in Alexandria, Virginia, while Meagan Hughes (Eun-Sook) grew up in Kingston, New York. They worked the same shift, struck up a friendship, and a DNA test proved their kinship. *Guardian, 13 Oct 2015.*

CANINE SPIRIT MESSAGE

In a talk at an 'Alternative Expo' outside Oslo, relating his many paranormal experiences, Norwegian celebrity outdoorsman Lars Monsen claimed to have made contact with his favourite dog Foss through a medium. "He identified himself to me and thanked me deeply and sincerely for making his journey so pleasurable", said the experienced sled dog racer. *Se og Hør (Look and Listen) Extra (Norway), 20 Nov 2015.*

WAY OFF COURSE

A short-eared owl flew more than 100 miles (160km) before crash-landing on a North Sea oilrig on 28 October 2015. It was returned to land by helicopter and taken to the Scottish SPCA wildlife rescue centre in Alloa, Clackmannanshire, where it was nursed back to health before being released. *Sun, 29 Oct 2015.*

SIDELINES...

REALLY CHRIS MASSEY

For 13 years, Chris Massey, 22, had the most festive name in the Manchester Co-op office, but last October the company hired a new employee with the same name; and the second Chris Massey, 47, was even born on Christmas Eve. *Sun, 22 Dec 2015*.

PURPLE SLIME

Starting last August, mysterious purple slime emerged around the picturesque Lyngen Fjord in northern Norway, coating millions of cubic meters with a strange mucoid, margarine-like substance that had never been seen before. Oceanographers at Norway's Institute of Marine Research (IMR) argued that it might have been caused by a gigantic bloom of cigar comb jellyfish (*Ctenophora beroe*), which had then partially disintegrated. *The Local (Norway) online, 10 Nov 2015.*

WHOOPS!

A hunter in northern Norway shot dead two moose before realising moments later that he was shooting through the fence of the Polar Park Arctic Wildlife Centre. He was with a group hunting moose with specially trained dogs at the boundary of the park. One of the dogs went under the fence and the hunter took a shot. His bullet passed through one animal, killing it, and lodged in the stomach of a second, which later had to be euthanised. *[CNN] 19 Oct 2015*.

BADGES OF PRIDE

According to the US Department of Social Security, recent months have seen newborns called Princecharles, Dagger, Londynne, Royaltee, Royel, Amillion, Ruckus and Swastik. Five boys were called Renegade, six were named Kaliber, six Bulut, and five Legendary. Seven girls were called Excel (after the software program). *D.Mail, 28 May 2015*.

ALIEN SEX FIENDS

... AND THE LIMERICK GRANDFATHER TAKEN TO THE NORTH POLE BY ETs

Bridget Nielson and Aluna Verse are part of the Hybrid Baby Community, a group of women claiming they have offspring fathered by aliens, who live with their fathers on spaceships. Former marketing executive Bridget, 27, from Sedona, Arizona, described being taken on board a spaceship. "It was great," she said. "It was an incredible super primal sexual experience. There was a real freedom and we were really going for it. It was the best sex I ever had." She lives in Arizona with her father but claims to have regular contact with aliens, and to have 10 hybrid children. "They are not just taking our children," she said, "they are creating a hybrid race to better humanity." She claimed many other women might have had alien children without realising it, because they were taken in a dream state.

Video game designer Aluna, 23, from Los Angeles, claims to have three alien babies. She spoke about her first experience: "I was in a classroom setting with other humans. All of sudden I'm sat next to this green reptilian creature and immediately I'm so sexually turned on looking at this being. I was very surprised. We're making love in this classroom in front of everyone. Everyone turned their attention to us. It sounds crazy and people have asked if I'm off my meds. But this is really happening."

Both women sketch drawings of what their hybrid children look like. Most display reptilian features with big black eyes, along with more human characteristics. The two women said their sexual encounters were real intercourse; conceptions can also happen through artificial insemination – but only to people who on some level "want to be taken". Both say they have struggled in the 'real' world because of their alien encounters. Bridget said: "I don't really have normal relationships any more. This has become my normal. I know people who are married or have boyfriends and when they tell them it goes down badly. There is a sadness because you can't be with them [the hybrid children]. Members of the Hybrid Baby Community hope to find a place far from the city to live together, where the children will feel safe to visit. *Metro, D.Mail, 21 Jan 2016.*

News of an archetypical alien abduction has reached Fortean Towers, courtesy of the *Irish Sun* (online, 11 Feb 2016). Gerry Battles, 61, from Pallaskenry, Co Limerick, was

ABOVE AND LEFT: Bridget Nielson (left) and Aluna Verse display sketches of their hybrid offspring.

PHOTOS: SOLENT NEWS

LET THE REAL E.T.
WE ARE NOT ALONE

BREANDAN GLEESON

ABOVE: Gerry Battles, an alien abductee from Co Limerick, admits that anyone he has told his story to thinks he is mad.

> **“Use the Force. Be one with the Force. Harness the Force.”**

walking home after two Christmas pints on St Stephen’s night (26 December) 2001. “It was a clear, dry night,” he recalled. “Really crisp and frosty – just beautiful. You could have read a book with the light off the night sky, but I wasn’t drawn by the light of the stars or the Moon but by a bright, surgical, white light coming from the other end of the boreen [country lane]. I was only minutes away from my house but it was such a clear and beautiful night that I stopped to gaze at the stars.”

The next thing he remembered was finding himself aboard a spacecraft with about 40 others, all in a subdued state, standing motionless like statues. “They were all male, of different age groups, all standing shoulder to shoulder like mannequins,” he said. “I remember one man next to me wearing a Columbo-style coat and hat. We were all in a state of paralysis, I could only move my eyes, so I couldn’t see much. The next thing I remember is floating into another bigger chamber with a 360-degree viewing deck. It was then I saw the extraterrestrial. I couldn’t tell how big he was or even if he had arms or legs, all I remember is his big cone head and his beautiful, ginormous eyes. They were jet black, almost like mirrors. He spoke to me through telepathy and said: ‘You are not terrified like the others’. Mr Battles said: “No, I am not. Should I be?” The alien then quizzed the Limerick grandfather about what he would like to see. “The North Pole,” came his instant reply. “The next thing the extraterrestrial gave a command, and in an instant we were at the North Pole. I was in awe. I remember thinking of that line from *Star Trek* – ‘warp speed Mr Sulu’. It was like driving through a snowstorm at 500 miles an hour.”

Mr Battles admits that anyone he has told this story to thinks he is mad. He laughs when he is asked if he has any history of mental illness. “No, not at all.” He said the alien told him that in the year 2851 “a giant asteroid the size of Munster is going to obliterate your planet. The asteroid will approach your planet from the 35th Quadrant. We are four million light years more advanced than you are. We have been observing you for millennia. In all that time you have only excelled at two things – global warfare and lying to your own species. You must use the force. Be one with the force. Harness the force.” [It sounds as if this ET had been watching *Star Wars*]. Mr Battles continued: “He told me that every one of our governments have been lying to us from day one and not to trust them. He also warned not to trust the banks as they have been lying as well and have a hidden agenda. He also forewarned the impending global financial crisis and told me that if we do not change our ways we are going to end up like the dinosaurs.”

Mr Battles has no recollection of how long the episode lasted and no memory of it afterwards until the coat he was wearing that night turned up in a most unlikely location. “A contractor working at the Regional Hospital found the coat up on the hospital roof a few weeks later,” he said. “I have no idea how it got there. It was only after having the coat returned to me that the strange events of that night started to come back to me.”

SIDELINES…

IF THE NAME FITS…

A biologist at Queen Mary University in London warned that if the emerald ash borer, a small green beetle whose larvæ kill trees faster than ash dieback, arrived in Britain, it could devastate our woodlands to the same extent as Dutch elm disease. The biologist’s name? Richard Buggs. *Times, 5 Nov 2015*.

SETTLING DOWN

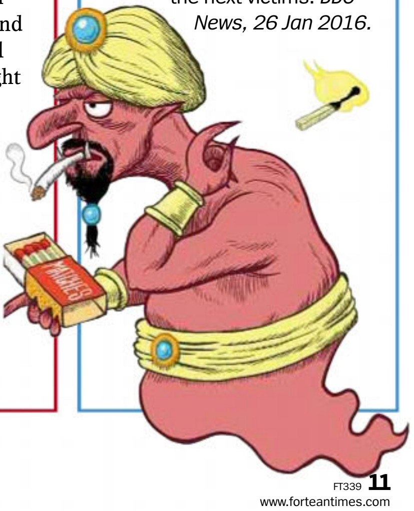
A wild pig gave up its ‘boaring’ life, leaving the forest to live with a small herd of cattle. Farmer Dirk Reese said the boar, nicknamed Banana, had been living with the eight farm animals for more than two months on his property north of Hamburg. *Metro, 8 Dec 2015*.

WATER BISCUITS DROWNED

United Biscuits have suspended production of Carr’s water biscuits after Storm Desmond left the their factory in Carlisle deluged with 5ft (1.5m) of water. The brick ovens used to bake water biscuits suffered significant damage. “Oh the irony,” commented the company. *D.Telegraph, 22 Jan 2016*.

FIERY PERSECUTION

A village in northern Egypt has been gripped by panic after dozens of houses were burnt in a series of mysterious fires. Police were investigating, but villagers believed the fires were caused by djinn (genies). Several families in Mina Safour had abandoned their homes and were staying in the streets over fears that they could be the next victims. *BBC News, 26 Jan 2016.*



MARTIN ROSS

BURNING SHAME

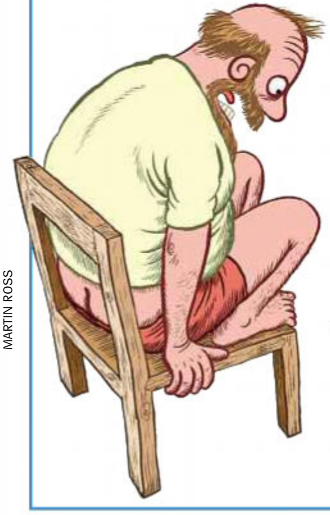
Fire crews called to a forest fire in Bavaria on 4 October found that the culprit was the state's own forestry minister. Helmut Brunner, who had spent the summer warning about the high risk of forest fires, had tried to dispose of the remains of a garden bonfire by tipping the embers into a wood. *D.Telegraph, 9 Oct 2015.*

BEAST'S HOUSE BURNS

A Scottish manor house once owned by Aleister Crowley and Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page has been partially burnt down. About 60 per cent of Boleskine House, on the banks of Loch Ness near Foyers in the Highlands, was destroyed by the time fire crews arrived at 1.40pm on 23 December. There was no one at home at the time. Page owned the house from 1971 to 1992. It was put up for sale in 2009 for £176,000. *D.Express, 24 Dec 2015.*

WAS SHE DEAD?

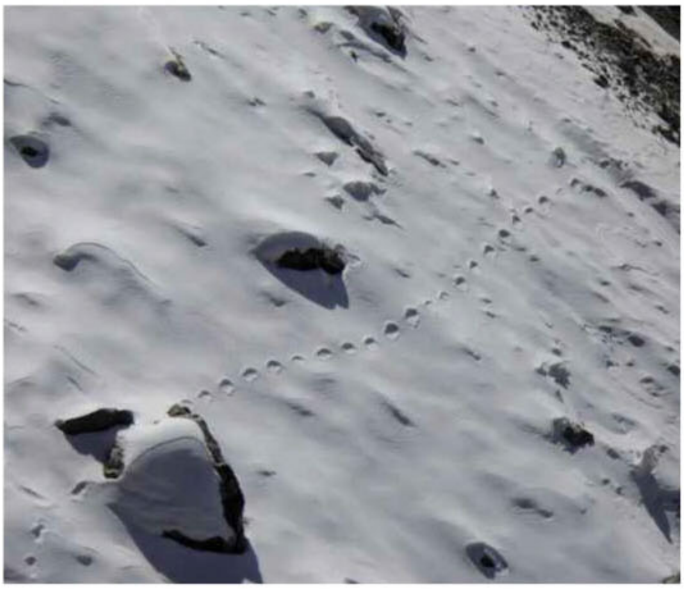
Residents in Sydney called police at 2am after they heard furniture being thrown around a house, screaming, and a man shouting: "I'm going to kill you! You're dead! Die! Die!" Officers in several cars raced round and interviewed the man. He sheepishly confessed: "It was a spider… a really big one." And the screaming woman? "Sorry, that was me. I really, really hate spiders." *D.Mirror, 27 Nov 2015.*



MARTIN ROSS

Yeti prints in Bhutan?

Himalayan trekker finds mysterious footprints on mountain

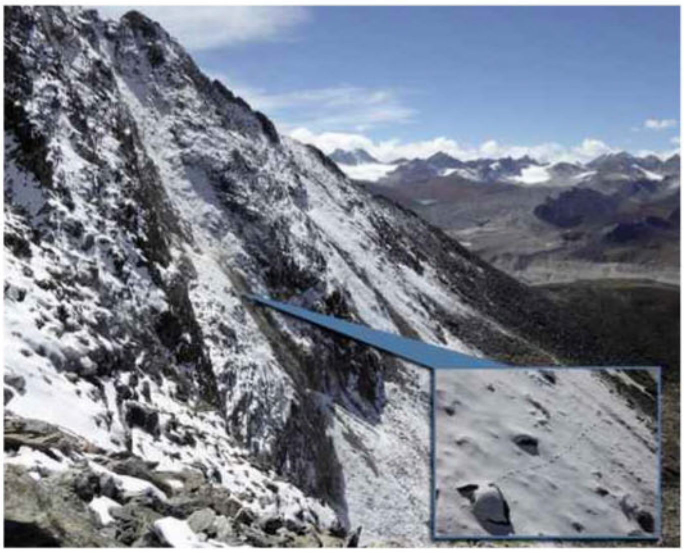


Trekker Steve Berry believes the footprints in this photograph, taken in the kingdom of Bhutan, were made by a yeti. As the prints are in a straight line, one in front of the other, he insists they could not have been made by a snow leopard or any other quadruped – while a bear can walk on two legs, its sheer bulk would make it impossible for it place its paws so precisely. However, the prints look pretty unnatural for a biped as well. Berry's Bhutanese guide spotted the tracks on Gangkhar Puensum, at 24,840ft (7,570m) the world's highest unclimbed mountain, in October 2014.

"The prints were clearly visible with the naked eye from where we were standing on a pass at 17,800ft [5.425m]," said Berry, who lives near Badminton in Gloucestershire. "There was a vertical drop in front of us, not to mention a very serious mountainside to cross, so we could not get to them… The local people said we were the first to ever set foot on that pass. I had always thought that stories about the yeti were a bit of old bunkum, but there is no denying these tracks existed." It was another four days before Berry reached human habitation and was able to share news of his find.

There a yak herder told him he had seen the yeti, or migo as it is known in Bhutan, once, some 11 years earlier. "He said it was about 100 yards from him and standing upright facing him and looked straight at him," said Berry. "It was completely covered in long dun brown-coloured hair and a face covered in hair like a cat or dog but of human height. Then, he said, 'You can recognise migo tracks because they put one foot directly in front of the other', and I nearly fell over. I showed him the pictures from my camera and he said, 'Yes, these are migo tracks'."

As Berry's company Mountain Kingdoms specialises in Himalayan treks, no doubt an appearance by the Abominable Snowman would be good for business. While Berry, his guide and even the Bhutanese royal family – who take a keen interest in the creature – are convinced that the footprints were made by a yeti, others are sceptical. Jon Downes of the Centre for Fortean Zoology, for instance, was reported as saying that the slope is so steep that only an animal like a mountain goat would have been able to negotiate it – but the prints don't look much like goat tracks… in fact, we are reminded of the famous "Devil's Hoofmarks" across Devon back in 1855 (see Mike Dash's feature in *Fortean Studies* #1, 1994, pp71-150). Finally, we can recall the handy Sherpa tradition that the yeti will only show itself to those who believe in it. *D.Mail, D.Star, 1 Feb 2016.*



TOP: The prints photographed by Steve Berry in Bhutan, and (above) a wider shot showing their location on the steep slopes of Gangkhar Puensum.

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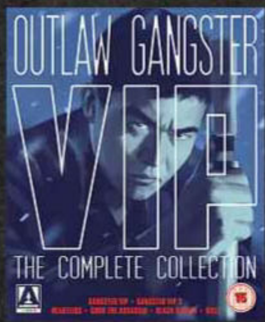
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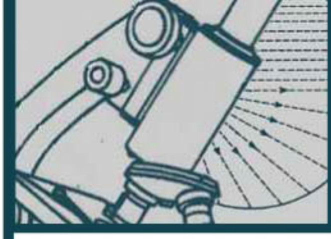
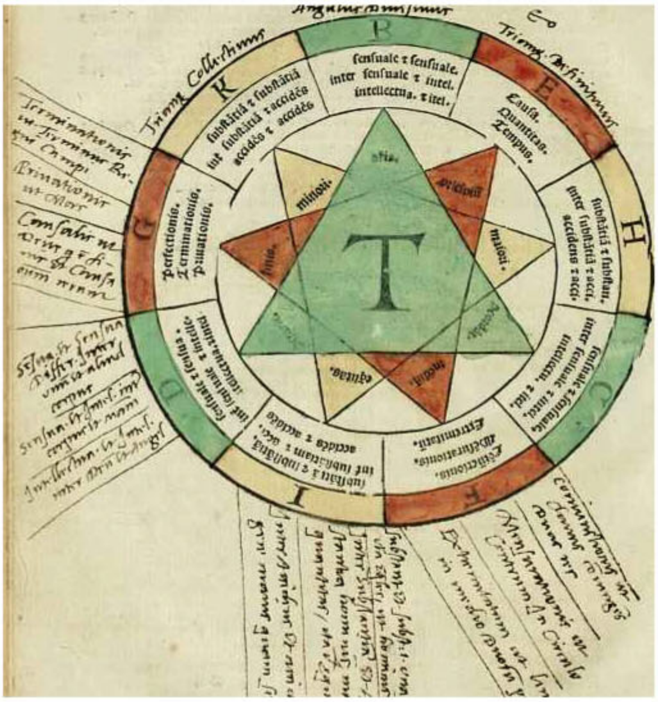


MATT PATTINSON

THE GREAT ART

DAVID HAMBLING explains how the 14th century Catalan Illuminatus Ramon Llull designed the ultimate computer



Information technology is the defining characteristic of our era; we all carry supercomputers in our pockets, connected to a global information network. The only question is how long it will take to reach the fabled "singularity" when the computers surpass human intelligence and even comprehension. While computer science might seem like a scientific occupation, it is rooted in the work of a remarkable mystic seven centuries ago.

Ramon Llull was a Catalan philosopher who died in 1316. His life's work was the development of a logical tool capable of producing new knowledge. Specifically, his reasoning engine would be able to demonstrate by pure logic the validity of Christian beliefs in the face of Jewish or Islamic objections.

It is a mark of Llull's character that he learned Arabic specifically in order to debate with Moslem theologians. He soon found that in such arguments it was no use appealing to church or classical authorities as you could in Spain; the other side would simply cite their own authorities back. What was needed was something which did not rely on any external information, but which could produce irrefutable proofs based on the truths shared by the three Abrahamic religions.

Llull's device would be a portable encyclopædia that would contain every thought that it was possible to think, everything that could be said about a topic, and "a solution to every question the human mind might pose". Which really would make it a supercomputer.

The initial version of the device consisted of rotating paper discs inscribed with symbols or letters that referred to particular attributes of God. By turning the discs, the symbols could be combined in different ways to reveal particular truths about the divine will. Llull claims that the idea behind the design came from a divine revelation, and he is sometimes known as Doctor Illuminatus.

Llull may have been inspired by the Arabic Zairja, an astrological instrument of rotating metal discs. This provided rhyming answers to any question when set to the appropriate zodiacal angle. One difference is that Zairja's answers are cryptic couplets reminiscent of Nostradamus and require some poetic interpretation, whereas Llull's symbols follow a complex but logical scheme. The history and working of the Zairja are explained in David Link's "Scrambling T-R-U-T-H: Rotating Letters as a Material Form of Thought".

According to Llull's views, everything about a given field can be understood by combinations of the underlying principles. For example, given the three sets of ideas in sandwich-making of ham/cheese/chicken, brown/white/wholemeal and ketchup/mayonnaise/mustard, you can enumerate every possible sandwich – "ham on white with mustard", "cheese on wholemeal with ketchup" and discover new sandwiches by going through the combinations.

The idea was taken up by Giordano Bruno, and a similar idea appears as Guido Camillo's Theatre of Memory. In *Wolf Hall*, Hilary Mantel has Cromwell speculating on what Camillo's invention could do: "A printing press that can write its own books? A mind that can think about itself?"

The Theatre of Memory resembled the 'memory palaces' that had been used since classical times, visual mnemonics for recalling large amounts of information, recently popularised in BBC's *Sherlock*. But the Theatre of Memory is not just about storing memories, but creating a structured model of the Universe. "Whoever entered the theatre would emerge with a complete memory of all the knowledge that had ever existed," Camillo asserted.

Camillo's description gives little detail of how it worked; possibly it generated information by putting the relevant combination of 'actors' on its stage for any given topic, such as Africa and Animal for African Animals.

The great 17th century mathematician Leibniz saw the power of Llull's *ars combinatoria* for exploring new possibilities. All complex concepts are simply different combinations of simpler concepts. By identifying the letters in the alphabet of ideas, Leibniz sought ways of inventing new, valid ideas, using examples from music, the law and philosophy. Leibniz citied Hobbes's view that all thinking is merely a form of computation, and in *ars combinatoria* he identified a possible means for carrying this out. Thanks to Leibniz's support, many now regard Llull as the founder of information science.

In its simplest form, the *ars combinatoria* appears in novelties like random business jargon generators that produce plausible-sounding business-speak: "You really can't fail with synchronised digital paradigm shifts."

The idea was well-enough known for Swift to mock it in *Gulliver's Travels*. On the mad scientist's flying island of Laputia, Gulliver has a demonstration of a mechanism of rotating blocks that can, at the turn of a handle, produce random combinations of words. The inventor promises that "the most ignorant person at a reasonable charge, and with a little bodily labour, may write books in philosophy, poetry, politics, law, mathematics, and theology, without the least assistance from genius or study."

Needless to say, the machine produces gibberish with only occasional coherent phrases, recorded by a team of scribes. The inventor shows Gulliver several books of broken sentences which he intends to piece together to discover new arts and sciences. (Or perhaps the complete works of Shakespeare). Llull's art is more sophisticated, but requires a thorough understanding of the meaning and use of his symbols. For example, in the *Book of Light* he explains that "B. means Goodness, Difference, Light and Whether… C. means Greatness, Concordance, Light and What." The meaning of the combination BC will depend on the subject being discussed. Llull assures the reader that: "Once you know the principles by heart, the ones which best apply to the topic at hand will become obvious."

His proto-computers did little to help Llull win converts in his missionary quests to Islamic countries; in later life he described himself as a poor, despised penitent considered mad by the world. Seven hundred years later it is perhaps still too early to say whether Llull was a madman or a genius. Maybe the computers will be able to tell us after the singularity.

Life after death

TO KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING IS TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN

Based on the erosion process 'solid rock to boulders to pebbles to sand' our great scholars collectively agreed that to form all the sand in the world would take a thousand million years, an aeon, and confirmed "This Planet Must Be Old"

Dictionary – Sand – *Created over the past half billion years.*

From this point onwards everything known to the history of Mankind was constructed. Deeptime was born; sedimentation rates, dinosaurs, fossil record, evolution, plate tectonics, are all dated from this old planet perspective. Combined facts that give radioactivity there atomic readings.

However' an aeon to form the entire world's sand is totally wrong because beach pebbles are formed by the process of tidemark, they get bigger not smaller. Every dirty tide leaves a mark, a dirty stain over the previous hardened and scuffed stain, broken layers clearly seen if one wishes to see them. A sea-basin is just like a dirty washbasin and the mechanics are fully explained in this powerful and detailed book.

Consequently the foundation for an old planet and therefore radiometric dating is wrong. Sand has come from our missing landscapes, from places like the Grand Canyon and the Great Butts of Arizona, removed when the forming limestone was still soft and mud-like.

The steep sides of these canyons and gorges tell us how the pyramids were built and knowing how the pyramids were built tells yet another story, a story quite opposed to evolution. It seems circumstances prevailed that took mankind on a course down to animal rather than the other way around.

But is RT right? Only a closer inspection of the humble beach pebble will call for a geological recount.

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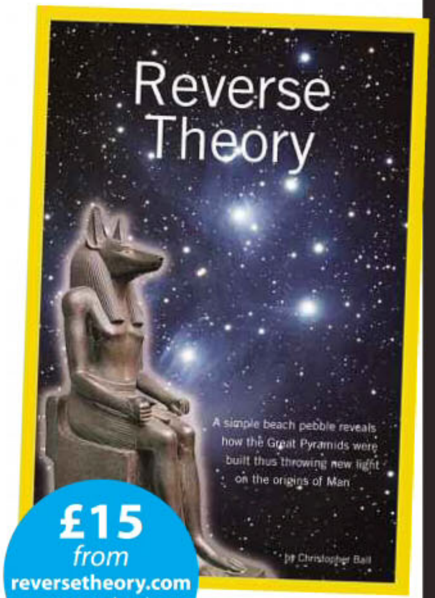
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Annandale's Smuggling Story
Frances Wilkins
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MATT PATTINSON

ARCHÆOLOGY

Our archæological round-up is brought to you by **PAUL DEVEREUX**, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind – The Journal of Archæology, Consciousness and Culture* (www.tandfonline.com/rtam)

ONCE UPON A TIME...

By analysing links between stories worldwide, anthropologist Jamie Tehrani and folklorist Sara Graca Da Silva, of Durham and Lisbon Universities respectively, have concluded that some of the classic fairytales had origins in prehistory. They used phylogenetic analysis (actually developed by biologists to investigate evolutionary relationships between species), and a tree of Indo-European languages to plot 275 shared story motifs on it, to see how far back in time they could be traced. *Jack and the Beanstalk*, for example, was part of a set of stories classified as 'The Boy Who Stole Ogre's Treasure', and could be traced back to when eastern and western Indo-European languages split more than 5,000 years ago. Again, the researchers' analysis showed *Beauty And The Beast* and *Rumpelstiltskin* to be about 4,000 years old. The folk tale called 'The Smith And The Devil', which tells of a blacksmith trading his soul to the Devil in return for supernatural powers enabling him to weld any materials together – but who was later able to use those powers to trick the Devil – was estimated to go back 5,000-6,000 years to Proto-Indo-European societies, when metallurgy was just beginning and when, according to archæological and genetic evidence, there were major territorial expansions by nomadic tribes from the Pontic steppe (just north of the Black Sea). This basic plot structure, with its Faustian pact, was found to recur throughout the Indo-European speaking world, from India to Scandinavia. (However, there has been a small amount of scholarly controversy as to the claim for such an early date for this particular story motif.)

Academic and folklore expert Marina Warner, referring to the *Beauty and the Beast* ('The Animal Bride') motif, remarked: "It's making sense of our relationship with the natural world – eliminating the threat. A beast figure marries a woman, and then the stories take different turns; in one she kills him, in one she finds he turns into a man when she kisses him."

Such classic fairytales, including others like *Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White*, were of course famously collected and reinterpreted by the Brothers Grimm. Interestingly, they too thought the basic motifs of the stories originated far back in time, but scholars largely dismissed their view, and the fairytales were deemed to have been created in Mediæval or even Early Modern times. But the wheel of opinion now turns with the appearance of this paper. "We can come firmly down on the side of Wilhelm Grimm," avers Tehrani. "Some of these stories go back much further than the earliest literary record and indeed further back than Classical mythology – some versions of these stories appear in Latin and Greek texts – but our findings suggest they are much older than that." *Royal Society Open Science Journal, via the Guardian, 20 Jan 2016.*

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON

We have long known that the ancient Babylonians could handle algebra and simple arithmetic, especially in the service of astrology (see review of the re-issue of a book by the late Michael Baigent in **FT337:63**), but now researchers from Berlin's Humboldt University say they have managed to trace evidence in c.2,200-year-old cuneiform texts (wedge-shape marks impressed on clay tablets) lodged in the British Museum that they were more sophisticated. They invented an abstract spatial geometry that was a forerunner of what today we call integral calculus, which enables the calculation of the movements of an object with a changing velocity. Such was not known in Europe until the Middle Ages. So it was that the Babylonians were able to plot the apparently irregular motion of Jupiter (the planetary representative of the Babylonian's chief god) as seen from the Earth. Because of the relationship between the orbits of the two planets, Jupiter's motion in our heavens appears to slow, and if its speed were plotted as a graph against time, the line would slope down. Looking at the graph, this would create a shape beneath the line consisting of a four-sided shape with a curving top side. By measuring the area of this shape beneath the curve (a basic operation in calculus), those ancient astronomers were able to calculate the distance moved. The geometry was not recorded directly on the clay tablets, but the cuneiform descriptions made it clear this way of calculating did take place. *Science, vol.351, no.6272, pp.435, via the Independent, 29 Jan 2016.*

WOMENS' RITES

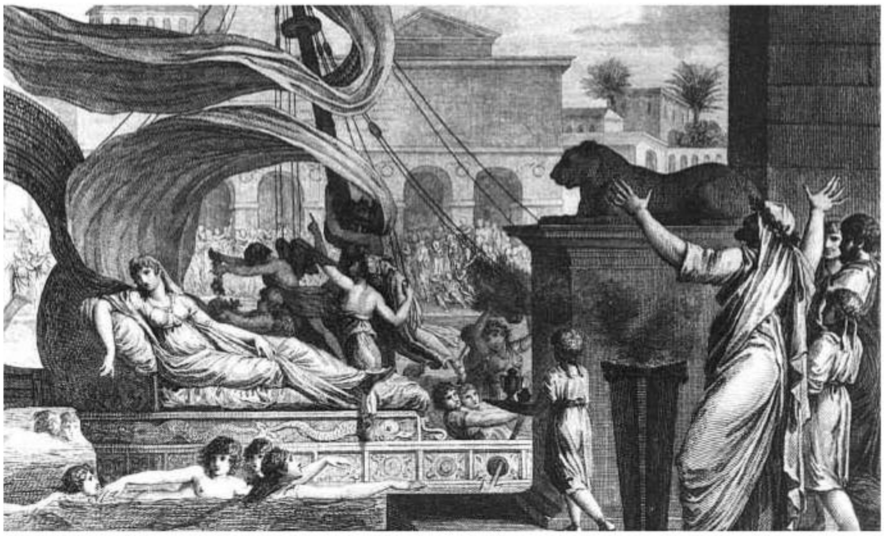
An article in *British Archaeology* reports on a recently completed study of finds resulting from a comprehensive excavation of cremated bones at Stonehenge that took place in 2008 (one of the last excavations there by the Stonehenge Riverside Project, in fact). Christie Willis of University College London sorted through some 45kg (99lb) of bone fragments. She was eventually able to identify the remains of 14 females and nine males. The bones had originally been excavated in the 1920s, then later dumped in Aubrey Hole 7 by archæologists – less interested in such remains in those days when modern analytical techniques were unavailable. This had caused them to become jumbled together, explaining why this forensic study had taken so long. The presence of so many female remains is noteworthy, indicating gender equality during the 500-to-700-year period of burials at Stonehenge during the late Neolithic era. And, moreover, they would presumably have been high-status individuals to be buried there. The 2008 excavations had also found a previously undiscovered burial near the Aubrey Holes, and this too turned out to be that of a woman. Overall, it is guessed that perhaps 100 to 200 burials were made at and around Stonehenge, though so far this has not been confirmed by archæological finds. *British Archaeology, Mar/April 2016, pp.26-33.*

CHRISTIE WILLS / UCL

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

197: ALL SHIPSHAPE



HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

"No one ever went to Hell in a black ship" – Homer

Jehovah, wearing his naval architect's hat, gave (Genesis 6-9) Noah a very specific DIY ark-building set of instructions:

Build a vessel of gopher wood, smeared inside and out with pitch, with three decks and inside compartments, an entrance on the side, 300 cubits long, 50 cubits wide, 30 cubits high with a roof finished to a cubit upwards – a cubit was measured from elbow to finger-tips, hence of variable length.

A fair-sized hulk. But, just how did he get all those animals in? – we won't go into the question of disposal of bladder and bowel effluvia. Unless we reckon the Ark to have been an aquatic proto-Tardis. After all, Noah was (Genesis 7. 6) 600 years old, an ancient mariner by terrestrial standards, average for a Time-Lord. Cries out for a mini-series with resurrected William Hartnell. Meanwhile, we must make do with periodically reported sightings of the vessel on Mount Ararat – talking Turkey here, we ark-eologists.

Demetrius 'Poliorketes' (337-283 BC) – his nickname means 'Besieger of Cities', not 'Taker', was the first to deploy ships with 15 or 16 banks of oars (Plutarch, *Demetrius*, chs43 paras 4-5). Or does this mean 15/16 rowers per? Debate continues – a case of either/oar?

They worked, unlike the monster (Plutarch subjoins) constructed by Ptolemy Philopator (r. 221-205 BC): 40 banks of oars, 280 cubits long, 48 cubits high to top of stern, propelled by 4,000 rowers, also carrying 400 extra sailors and 3,000 soldiers. But, gibes Plutarch, the thing was merely for show, being unable to move.

Another uselessly large vessel was the flagship of Philip V of Macedon, which after their victory the Romans insultingly allowed him to keep, confiscating his other ships (Polybius, *Histories*, bk18 ch44 para6) – could add a verse here to John Masefield's 'Cargoes'.

Philopator also had built (Athenæus, *Learned Men at Dinner*, chs20e-206c) a pleasure boat, likened by some moderns to an over-sized catamaran, luxurious enough to satisfy the most exigent Russian oligarch, with its ample dimensions, luxurious cabins and suites and purple sails – outdoing the hues in that classic ditty 'Red Sails in the Sunset' – and fitted out for maritime orgies – one visualises navel engagements without loss of semen.

His aforementioned monster was an attempt to out-godzilla the good ship *Syracusia*, designed (c. 240 BC) for King Hieron II by Archimedes, taking time off from his much-disputed burning of Roman ships' sails by gigantic refracting mirrors and shouting 'Eureka' – Greek for "I've found my rubber duckie" – in his bathtub. Athenæus (chs206d-209e) categorises the details. Cargo capacity almost 2,000 tons, space for 1,942 passengers, 200 soldiers, and a catapult. As Noah's Ark, it was pitch-coated, reinforced with horsehair, praised by modern experts (cf. Lionel Casson's *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, 1971) as earliest example of proactive anti-fouling technology.

Every detail was the last word in luxury. Apart from opulent cabins, passenger amenities included a flowered, canopied deck, gymnasium, hot-water pool, and (a touch of Swan Hellenic Cruises, if not the *Titanic*) a library and mosaics depicting the entire *Iliad*.

Also (again) a masterpiece of futility: it sailed only once, then dry-docked, clocking up immeasurably less furlongs than our naval *Queens Elizabeth* & *Mary*.

"The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne,
Burned on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were lovesick with them; the oars were silver,
Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke… she did lie
In her pavilion, cloth-of-gold of tissue…
(*Antony & Cleopatra*, Act 2 Scene 2)

Never saw anything like that on the Manchester Ship Canal. Bill the Bard's rhapsody is almost verbatim from Plutarch (*Antony*, ch26), endorsing the common view that the biographer was his prime source for the Roman plays.

Hannibal was more practical-minded, despite his Roman biographer (chs10-1) Cornelius Nepos's moral qualms, defeating the armada of King Eumenes of Pergamum by catapulting into his flagship clay pots containing live poisonous snakes – wouldn't have wanted the job of loading these tricky allies.

Around AD 150, Lucian (*The Ship*) left an excited account of the giant grain carrier *Isis* that he'd just seen docked at Athens's Piræus. He expatiates on its size (180ft x 45ft x 44ft), its tonnage (c. 12.000, capable of transporting an entire years' worth of grain to Attica), its scarlet sail, gilded prow, the name *Isis* elaborately painted on, with a crew the size of an army – "all relying on one little man steering with a broomstick-like tiller."

When not shagging his three sisters or designating his racehorse Consul, Caligula amused himself with his pleasure boats on Lake Nemi. Rediscovered in 1929 (burnt in 1944), with Mussolini taking a keen and doubtless envious interest, Suetonius's biography (ch37 para2) has this awestruck description: "Ten banks of oars, jewelled sterns, multi-coloured sails, enormous bathrooms, banquet-halls, colonnades, even profuse vines and fruit-trees, that he might feast amid songs and merriment along the Campanian shore."

In AD 59, Nero decided to bump off Agrippina the Queen Mum. Since she was long fortified against poison by a diet of antidotes, the plan was to sink her in a collapsible boat – he and mistress Poppæa got the idea from a theatrical show – there was also a Greek precedent: great minds think alike. As described by Tacitus (*Annals*, bk14 chs 4-8; Dio Cassius and Suetonius have briefer, somewhat discrepant accounts), the scheme was a total clap-out; cf. Alexis Dawson's hilarious 'Whatever Happened to Lady Agrippina?' *Classical Journal* 64, 1969, 251-67. The supposedly doomed vessel failed to telescope – only Agrippina's cabin ceiling fell in, crushing a male companion, and no one remembered she was a strong swimmer, making it through the calm (hardly ideal for staging a fake shipwreck) Bay of Naples to her villa where she was presently slaughtered by a military SWAT team.

"Every shipwreck brings out merrymakers" – Fort, *Books*, p636.

MATT PATTINSON

GHOSTWATCH

ALAN MURDIE hails new research into how deathbed visions of loved ones bring comfort

DEATHBED DREAMS

That you may have to wait a very long time before seeing a ghost is a truism. Except for some particularly psychically gifted individuals, encountering an apparition is typically a rare and exceptional event in life, usually occurring when you are least expecting it. Indeed, it might only be right at the very end of your life that you get to see a ghost, whilst undergoing the very process of dying yourself, judging by some new research from the United States. But don't fear it, since it is likely to be a positive experience and helpful if it happens to you.

In my column in the February 2014 issue (**FT311:16-17**), I referred to research conducted in 1961 by Dr Karlis Osis into the apparitional experiences of people dying in hospital. Dr Osis sent out a questionnaire survey to 285 physicians and 355 nurses, who reported having witnessed over 35,000 deaths of patients between them. They reported that 40 per cent of dying patients had visions or hallucinations, with an overwhelming preponderance seeing the apparitions of dead persons, usually deceased relatives of the dying patient. Typically, the experience had a calming effect and the apparition was interpreted as a spirit coming to greet the patient and help with the transition into the afterlife.

Now a new study appears to confirm these findings, emerging from the research of a team of clinicians led by Dr Christopher Kerr, Chief Medical Officer at Hospice Buffalo, Cheektowaga, New York. Initial findings were published in the *Journal of Palliative Care* in 2014 and this has now been followed up with a further survey, which has featured in the *New York Times* and is also the topic of a moving talk by Dr Kerr available on-line. The research reveals that dying patients are prone to vivid experiences of what the team terms 'visions', typically featuring the appearance of deceased loved ones accompanied by feelings of peace and comfort.

Whereas the Osis survey obtained its results from physicians and nurses attending dying patients, the survey by Dr Kerr's team received details of experiences direct from patients themselves. Doctors, nurses, social workers or chaplains would ask patients: "How have you been sleeping?" They often followed up with: "Can you recall any dreams?" This new approach has the resulted in 1,400 interviews with dying patients. Over 80 per cent of these had dreams or visions close to death that they described as "more real than real". These dreams or visions grow increasingly frequent as the person approaches death, and are populated with the dead rather than the living. In all dreams, these visions of the deceased were associated with the highest degree of comfort.

The researchers suggest such phenomena might even have prognostic value, a personal revelation that came to Dr Kerr through clinical practice. He explained: "I was an aggressive physician, always asking, 'Is there more we can do?' There was a patient who I thought needed to be rehydrated, and we could buy him some time". But a nurse, familiar with the patient's dreams, cautioned: "'You don't get it. He is seeing his dead mother.' He died two days later."

Consistent with the Osis research, the Kerr study finds that patients tend to be lucid rather than delirious when seeing deceased persons, and that the experiences could not be ascribed to the effects of medication. The Hospice Buffalo researchers say that while some study patients slipped in and out of delirium, their end-of-life dreams were not, by definition, the product of such a state. Delirious patients generally cannot engage with others or give a coherent, organised narrative, whilst the hallucinations they are able to describe may be traumatising, not comforting. In contrast, those reporting dreams showed clarity of mind and were not considered confused by drugs or fever. The content of the visions was largely comforting, whilst for some individuals with unresolved guilt or burdened by traumatic memories the experiences proved a mechanism to unlock mental caskets of pent-up emotional pain and bring healing and release. Physical wounds and illness could not be cured, but 'spiritual wounds' seem to be healed.

A patient identified as Matt, an 88-year-old WWII veteran, was troubled by recurrent nightmares stemming from his experience, as a 17-year-old soldier, of having to move the bodies of dead and wounded soldiers on the Normandy beaches on D-Day. During his last days in care he had seen a soldier on a beach, who said: "Soon they, your fellow soldiers, will come for you". After this, he died peacefully. "Matt was rescued by the dead soldiers he had tried to save… he had closure… his end-of-life experiences didn't deny his reality, didn't deny him his War, but recast it in such a way he was finally granted peace."

That there is a genuine cross-cultural phenomenon at work cannot be doubted: deathbed visions of one kind or another feature in the folklore, literature and culture of many countries. One of the first attempts to scientifically gather cases of deathbed visions was made by the early psychical researcher Sir William Barrett, a professor of physics at the Royal College of Science in Dublin. He became interested in the topic when his wife, who was an obstetrical surgeon, arrived home one night and told him about a woman named Doris who had died at the hospital that day from a hæmorrhage

HULTON ARCHIVE / GETTY IMAGES

HOSPICE BUFFALO

ABOVE: Dr Christopher Kerr with a patient. **TOP**: One D-Day veteran had nightmares of moving the dead and wounded on the Normandy beaches, but was comforted during his own last days by a dream of a soldier.

after giving birth. Just before she'd died, Doris sat up and become very excited about seeing a wonderful landscape and said that her father had come to escort her to the other side.

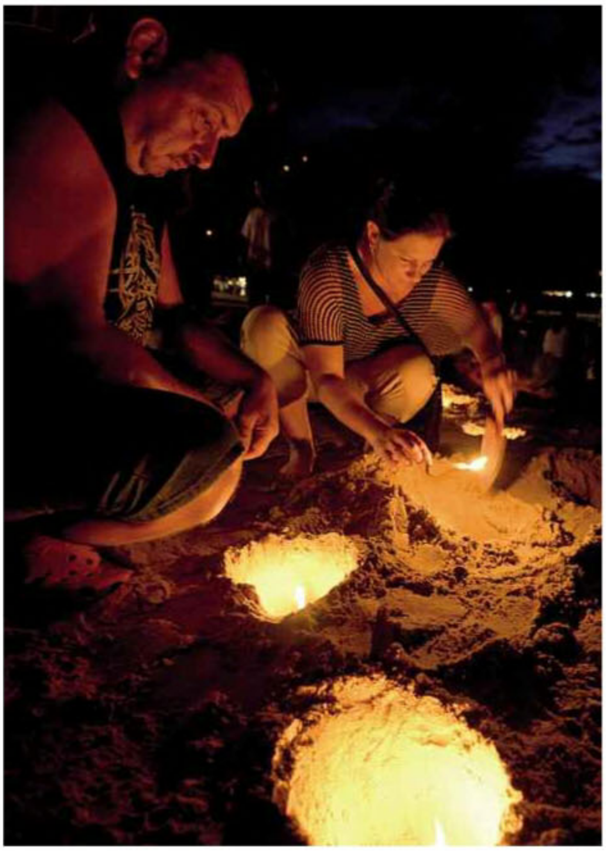
What most amazed the Barretts was the fact that the woman had suddenly expressed surprise at seeing her sister Vida by her father's side. It seems that Vida had died only three weeks earlier, but the news had been kept from Doris because she was so ill.

This story was so inspirational to Barrett that he undertook a systematic study of such cases and sought to place such experiences within the framework of psychical research. It proved to be his last area of research, published posthumously as *Deathbed Visions* in 1926. Others have taken a more spiritual approach, and interested readers are also directed to Kelly Buckley's *Dreaming Beyond Death: A Guide to Pre-Death Dreams and Visions* (2006).

Outside romance, few go to death today eagerly "as to a bridal bed", to quote essayist William Hazlitt, who regretted as long ago as 1822 the passing of the era "where the rough soldier, the infatuated lover the valorous knight etc could afford to throw away the present venture, and take a leap into the arms of futurity, which the modern sceptic shrinks back from with all his boasted reason and vain philosophy." Of course, modern mock-heroic scepticism may try to dismiss these experiences as the products of a disordered brain, but the point still remains: what actually is happening to the brain and mind with the approach to death?

Interestingly, Dr Kerr stressed in his talk that he did not maintain he was making any claims for the paranormal, and his team differentiates the dreams from the Near-Death Experience in which the patient recovers. But the visions in the study were loosely sorted into categories: opportunities to engage with the deceased; loved ones "waiting"; 'unfinished business'; and aspects of love given or witheld. These coursed through the dreams, along with needs for resolution and forgiveness. Amongst these broad themes can be recognised elements and motifs which feature in many traditional ghost stories, explaining the reasons why phantoms return and haunt or appear to the living.

Furthermore, Dr Kerr both speaks and writes about these experiences in language redolent of spirituality, stating: "End of life experiences represent a rich interconnectivity between body and soul, between the realities we know and those we don't, between our past and our present," and: "Most importantly, end of life experiences represent continuity between and across lives, both living and dead."



PORNCHAI KITTIWONGSAKUL / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

LEFT: Visitors light candles on Patong beach on the 10th anniversary of the tsunami.

THESE DREAMS CONTAIN MOTIFS WHICH FEATURE IN GHOST STORIES

He also shared his feeling that this work had chosen him, rather than the other way round. It certainly opens up the area to further investigation, and for leading such an extension of clinical research into this area Dr Kerr deserves to be saluted.

Sources: 'A New Vision for Dreams of the Dying' *New York Times* 2 Feb 2016 ; 'End-of-life dreams and visions: a longitudinal study of hospice patients' experiences' in *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, Mar 2014;17(3):296-303. doi: 10.1089/jpm.2013.0371. Epub 2014 Jan 11; *Deathbed Visions* (1926) by William Barrett.

GHOSTS OF THE TSUNAMI

Of course, it should not be imagined that all end-of-life experiences are as tranquil as modern hospice facilities endeavour to make them. Particularly if sudden, death also can be very traumatic and also have a serious impact on the living, particularly with major disasters involving large-scale loss of life. Such calamities seem to create hauntings that can be perceived as very different to apparitions seen by the dying, as shown by the latest reports of taxi drivers picking up ghostly passengers circulating in Japan in areas devastated by the tsunami of March 2011 (see **FT338:4**). In 2014, writer Hugh Lloyd Parry described in the *London Review of Books* (Vol 36, No 3, 6 Feb 2014) how people who had not experienced personal loss as a result of the tsunami nonetheless went on to see apparitions on the beach. One man hated going out because of seeing the eyes of people in puddles. Others showed possession-like symptoms or had dreams of the dead.

This persistence of the ghosts in Japan after the disaster has parallels with the Indian Ocean tsunami of Boxing Day 2004 which killed an estimated 227,898 people in 14 countries bordering the Indian Ocean. In Thailand, many of these were foreigners. Within four days, locals, including volunteers looking for bodies, were reporting hauntings by the spirits of tsunami victims. Most of the haunting entities were said to be foreigners. Troubled volunteer body searchers on the resort areas of Phi Phi Island and Khao Lak were reported to have looked for tourists when they heard laughing and singing from the beach, but found only darkness and empty sand.

At Patong, there were stories of a foreign female ghost walking along the shoreline at night calling for her child; the wailing or shrieking woman looking for her child is an archetypal ghost reported widely, from the Norfolk coast in England to Latin America, where she is known as 'La Llorona'. As in Japan, a number of Thai taxi drivers also told of picking up ghostly passengers at Patong. Several spoke of stopping for a foreign man and his Thai girlfriend who were going to the airport with all their baggage, only to then look in the rear-view mirror and find empty seats. A similar tale was told at Phuket, where a driver picked up four Western passengers to whom he chatted only to realise that all had vanished on reaching the airport. Witnesses thought many of these ghosts were unaware that they were dead and were continuing their holidays on the islands and beaches. Of course, it has long been recognised that "sometimes the mind acted upon by a sudden calamity" can trigger ghostly visions ('The History of the Mysterious House' c.1826, cited by Harry Price in *Poltergeist Over England*, 1945). In Thailand, mental health officials proposed as an explanation 'mass trauma', fuelled by cultural beliefs that the dead must be put to rest by a relative. With the great majority of foreign holidaymakers who died, that was obviously not possible. In the autumn of 2010, it was reported that sightings of foreign ghosts were still 'endemic'. Thus it may be some years before reports of sightings and manifestations in Japan dwindle.

Sources: *[AFP]*, 13 Jan 2005; *National Geographic News*, 10 Oct 2010.

THAI 'CHILD ANGELS'

Owners say they contain the souls of dead children, but some lifelike dolls have fallen foul of the law...

PHOTOS: CHRISTOPHE ARCHAMBAULT / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE LEFT: Mananya Boonmee, doll collector, producer and trader, sitting amongst *luuk thep* dolls at her house in Bangkok. **ABOVE LEFT**: A Thai policeman shows a *luuk thep* doll at the Economic Crime Suppression Division in Bangkok after more than 100 of them were seized in separate raids and three vendors arrested for tax avoidance.

A craze for life-like, infant-sized dolls sweeping Thailand has run into trouble. One of the *luuk thep* ('child angels') was found stuffed with 200 methamphetamine tablets at Chiang Mai airport in northern Thailand. These magical haunted dolls are believed to bring good luck, wealth and health. Aviation authorities are reviewing procedures for carrying *luuk thep* on aircraft after a low-cost local airline said it would allow passengers to purchase seats for the dolls so that they could be buckled up next to their owners. Thai Smile Airways, a subsidiary of Thai Airways International, said in an internal memo that dolls with tickets could be served snacks and drinks at window seats but would be banned from sitting in exit rows.

Chula Sukmanop, director-general of the Department of Civil Aviation, said the review would ensure that dolls meet security concerns after an increasing number of passengers refused to pack them in their luggage and even became angry and upset when flight attendants insisted they place the dolls in overhead compartments or under seats. *Luuk thep* are actually alive, insist their human 'parents', because they have the souls of dead children residing in them. A whole range of goods and services has been made available for the dolls: buffet promotions, gold jewellery, clothes and accessories; even spa and facial treatments. Neta Grill, a restaurant in Bangkok, advertises meals for *luuk thep* on its Facebook page, saying it would charge their owners children's prices for its buffet. Lacking substantial role models, many Thais look up to celebrities and follow whatever trend is started by their favourite stars. This is particularly true of the *luuk thep* craze – it took off just over a year ago after several celebrities claimed that their *luuk thep* dolls were behind their success and wealth.

Thai Airways passengers can purchase seats for the dolls

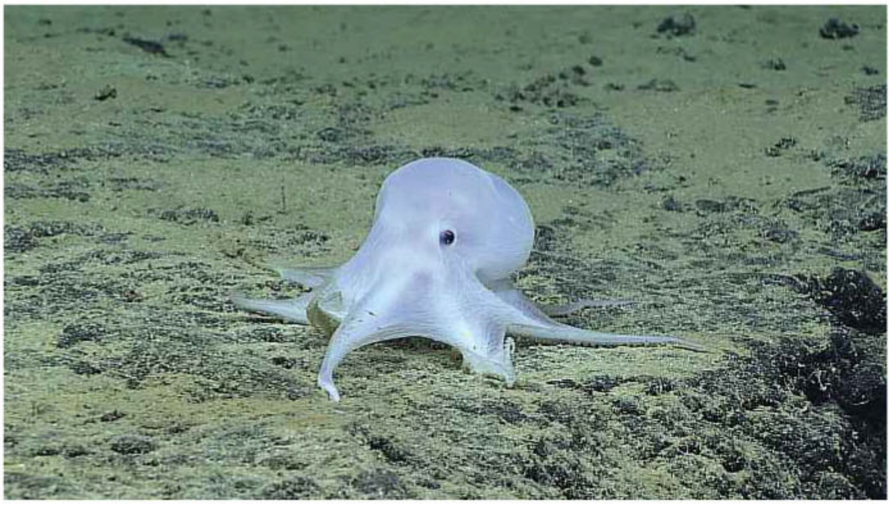
Factory-made *luuk thep* are the modern version of *kuman thong* ('golden child') – an ancient practice lingering from the Ayutthaya period (1351-1767), where a dead fœtus was roasted and covered in gold leaf in order to invite good fortune. Whoever possesses a *kuman thong* is obliged to care for and worship it in return for future favours, such as money, love and happiness; but since both a necromancer and a real fœtus are needed to make a *kuman thong*, a *luuk thep* is an updated and less morbid version. *Kuman thong* are normally kept discreetly at home, as a household divinity, while *luuk thep* are cuddled in public and pampered in restaurants. One simply has to buy a *luuk thep* doll, costing between 1,500 and 30,000 baht (£28 to £587), and instruct a Buddhist monk to recite a magical incantation to invite a dead child's soul in to inhabit the doll. Natsuda Jantabtim, 45, a beauty-salon owner who lives with her daughter and a doll called Nong Ruay Jung ('pretty rich') says: "I can see it in other people's eyes. I know some of them must be wondering why I am carrying a doll, but I just don't care."

Thailand, a predominantly Buddhist country with a population of about 66 million, is modernising rapidly and yet remains highly superstitious, with its Buddhist beliefs coexisting alongside Hinduism, animism, astrology and black magic rituals. Journalist Frances Suselo has seen many trends come and go over more than 20 years living in Thailand: 'power' stone bracelets, 'lucky' colour nail polishes, misshapen plants and animals that supposedly reveal winning lottery numbers. And who can forget the time when one of the leaders of the yellow shirts' People's Alliance of Democracy (PAD), Sondhi Limthongkul, used the bloody sanitary pads of the group's female members to repel the evil 'black magic' supposedly practised by the group's enemies?

Perhaps the most significant factor in the recently increasing rise of superstition is the overall malaise the whole country is feeling. The economy is spluttering, there is an ongoing drought, the military government is seemingly in no hurry to hold elections and return power to the people, and memories of last year's bombings are still raw. Last year was tough, and there is no reason to believe that 2016 will be better – there is a dengue outbreak, the rainy season is predicted to come late (worsening the ongoing drought), and foreign investment is down. *Canberra Times, Straits Times, 28 Jan; What's On Sukhumvit (Thailand), 2 Feb 2016.*

AZ ALIEN ZOO

KARL SHUKER presents his regular round-up from the cryptozoological garden


NOAA.GOV

A GHOST WITH EIGHT LEGS.

A never-before-filmed form of octopus dubbed the ghost octopus on account of its unusually pale appearance may well be not only a species new to science but also the deepest non-finned octopus ever recorded. (Certain octopuses have been recorded at greater depths, but these have all been finned species, such as the famous dumbo octopus, whose huge pair of lateral fins resemble the giant ears of cartoon elephant Dumbo.) It was filmed swimming slowly off the Hawaiian archipelago at a depth of approximately 2.6 miles (4.2km) by a remotely-operated vehicle with the *Okeanos Explorer*, a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship. The monitoring team, which included Smithsonian Institution zoologist Dr Michael Vecchione, was able to obtain a short video of this remarkable animal, which displays several adaptations for deepwater life. These include a very gelatinous body consistency, few muscles, and its distinctive pallid form, lacking the chromatophore cells responsible for the bright colours and rapid colour changes often seen in octopus species inhabiting shallower waters. This is because in the dark depths where it lives, such features and activities are superfluous. The ghost octopus does possess eyes, however, albeit very small ones, which if functional may help it espy the great variety of bioluminescent creatures sharing its shadowy realm, some of which it probably preys upon. *http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2016/03/160304-ghost-octopus-science-animals-oceans/, 4 Mar 2016.*

A BLACKER SHADE OF DARK #1

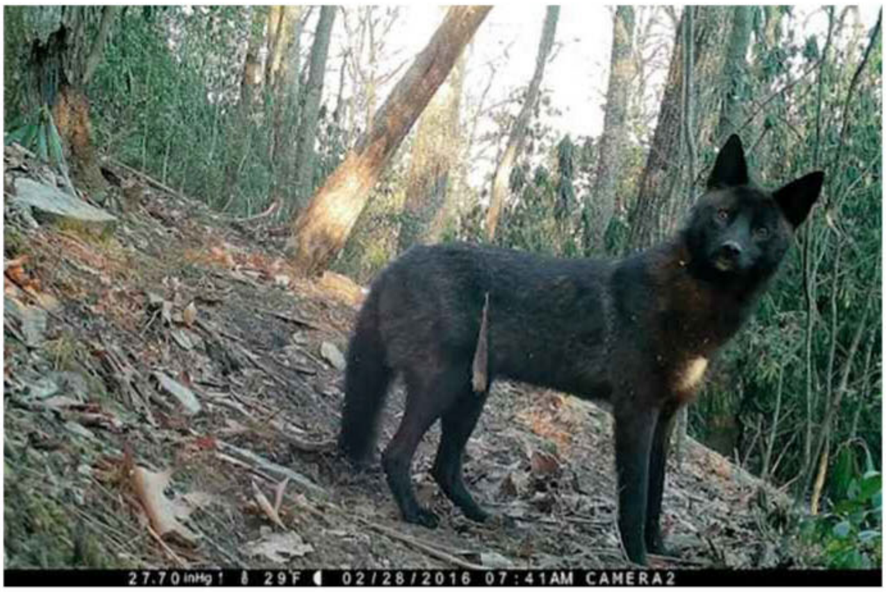
And speaking of pallid, ghostly novelties: last month's Alien Zoo (**FT338:15**) featured a rare white giraffe, but here are a couple of canine curiosities from the dark side, so to speak. All-black (melanistic) specimens of Britain's familiar red fox *Vulpes vulpes* are so striking in appearance but also so rare that in traditional rural folklore they are sometimes considered to be uncanny, even preternatural entities by the more superstitious-minded. In reality, however, their existence is due to nothing more remarkable than the expression of a mutant gene. When such creatures are occasionally seen, it is normally only the briefest of brief encounters, almost invariably from a distance, and the eyewitness more often than not either does not have a camera to hand or (mobile phone cameras are very useful here) lacks sufficient opportunity to use it.

In January 2016, however, Adam Lloyd of Hounslow, west London, revealed that he had bucked all of these trends, by publicly revealing a series of spectacular close-up photographs of a male black fox that he had been fortunate enough to spy, and not for just a moment or two. He had been able to watch and photograph it standing with a normal-coloured vixen on a nearby shed, but while doing so he and the foxes all heard another fox howling from the garden next door. The vixen retreated, but the black fox sauntered off to investigate. When the newcomer appeared, it proved to be a male normal-coloured fox, whereupon it was swiftly attacked and aggressively repulsed by the black fox, within whose territory it was clearly trespassing, and which lost no time exerting its dominance. Afterwards, all three ran off, but not before Lloyd had snapped some magnificent photos of the two rival males, black fox against red fox, rearing up at each other on their hind legs with teeth bared in fury. *D.Mail, 30 Jan 2016.*

A BLACKER SHADE OF DARK #2

Trail cameras placed in remote locations in the wild have often revealed some very shy, unexpected creatures, and the individual recently filmed by R Thomas Brass's trail cam at the top of Haywood Knolls in Hendersonville, North Carolina, was no exception – a black coyote. In the video, the animal can be seen rolling around on the ground and sniffing where it is rolling – Brass reveals that this is because he had placed "a small amount of very skunky smelling predator gel (that trappers use) on the ground on leaves, rocks and trees" in order to attract the attention of whatever animals might be passing through and keep them there, investigating the smell long enough to obtain some good close-up footage. It certainly worked well on this occasion, though there is some controversy as to whether the animal is indeed a coyote, or at least a purebred one. This is because coyotes readily mate with feral domestic dogs (yielding coy-dogs), and also with wolves (yielding coy-wolves), and sometimes even three-way hybrids occur (coy-wolf-dogs).

Yet whatever its genetic and taxonomic make-up, it is indisputably a beautiful creature, with a morphology rarely seen, and gives hope that one day a trail-cam like this may capture film of a bona fide cryptid. *http://www.hendersonvillelightning.com/news/4921-knollscam-gets-video-of-rare-black-coyote.html*



R THOMAS BRASS

TOP: The ghost octopus, filmed for the first time. **ABOVE RIGHT**: A rare black coyote peers into a trailcam set up by R Thomas Brass in Hendersonville, North Carolina.

SNIFFING OUT ILLNESS

Domestic animals (and humans) warn people of cancer and other conditions using smell

ROSS PARRY / SWNS GROUP

HARRY WHITEHEAD / CATERS NEWS AGENCY

LEFT: Tom, who spotted Sue's Hodgkin's lymphoma. **ABOVE:** Daisy alerted Fiona to lymph node cancer. **RIGHT:** Stephanie Doody and her life-saving cat Jaffy.

● Since Sue McKenzie, 64, welcomed her cat Tom into her home in Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, more than 20 years ago, they never had a particularly affectionate relationship, so she was puzzled when the former stray began repeatedly tapping her on the back of the neck with his paw and meowing loudly. "He did it constantly for about two weeks and was starting to drive me quite mad," she said. "Each time I sat down he was there tap, tap, tapping and it was always on my right shoulder." Concerned for the health of her usually aloof pet, she took 24-year-old Tom to a vet who gave him a clean bill of health, and suggested that he might be trying to tell his owner something. Mrs McKenzie then found a lump in her neck and in August 2014 was diagnosed with stage three Hodgkin's lymphoma. She recovered after surgery and chemotherapy. "I suppose it's all thanks to Tom, but he's not bothered," she said. "He's now gone back to being aloof." *D.Mail, 15 Sept 2015.*

● Stephanie Doody's pet cats saved her life. Rennie, Dinky and Jaffy wouldn't let her out of their sight and would sit on her lap and poke her abdomen. Jaffy started laying his head on her stomach as she slept and in July 2014, six months after the cats started acting oddly, Miss Doody, 55, from Tamworth in Staffordshire, found a small lump after losing some weight. A tumour was discovered on her appendix – a rare form of cancer (*pseudomyxoma peritonei*) that is usually without symptoms and goes undiagnosed until it is too late. "It wasn't until the day I got back from the doctors that [the cats] disappeared into their normal spots," said Miss Doody. "It was as if they were saying 'finally, you're discovered it'. It was unbelievable." She had a 12-hour operation in October 2014, and was recovering well at the time of the news report. *D.Mail, 30 Jan 2015.*

● Karin Gibson of Portsmouth discovered she had breast cancer thanks to her pet Labrador. She had just returned from holiday when six-stone Paddy began climbing on her and smelling her breath as she sat on the sofa. He kept nudging and pawing at her right breast until eventually she went for a mammogram, which revealed the invasive ductal carcinoma. Thanks to this timely discovery, she had a 99 per cent chance of a full recovery after a simple operation. *The News (Portsmouth), Sun, 25 Sept 2015.*

● Josie Conlon, 46, from Stockton-on-Tees, had no idea she had an aggressive tumour in her breast until Ted, her normally reserved two-year-old collie, began to repeatedly cry, paw and nuzzle her chest. She then felt a lump, sought medical help, and had it successfully removed in December 2014. *D.Telegraph, D.Mail, 2 Jan 2015.*

> **"She started sniffing and nudging the underside of my left breast"**

● Fiona Cole, 41, was alerted to her breast cancer by her cocker spaniel Daisy. "She started acting strangely, sniffing and nudging with her nose the underside of my left breast," said Mrs Cole. "I ignored her for three weeks. Then one night when I was sitting on the sofa she jumped up and head-butted it. It was only when I checked the next morning as I thought Daisy had given me a bruise, that my husband Conrad and I realised to our horror there was a gobstopper-sized lump." The cancer had spread to her lymph nodes, but was caught in the nick of time. Mrs Cole, from Quinton, West Midlands, recovered after chemotherapy and surgery. *Sunday Mirror, 25 Aug 2013.*

● A wealth of anecdotal evidence over many years, backed up by research, indicates that dogs can detect when diabetics' blood sugar levels are falling, and are able to forewarn epileptics of imminent fits [**FT205:18-19**]. It all seems to be down to their extremely sensitive olfactory powers.

Research has shown that dogs can detect prostate cancer in men almost every single time. The study (published in the *Journal of Urology*) involved two female German shepherd dogs sniffing the urine of 900 men – 360 with prostate cancer and 540 without. Scientists at a research centre in Milan found one got it right in 98.7 per cent of cases, while the other was correct in 97.6 per cent of cases. The dogs were detecting specific volatile organic compounds.

The results echoed previous research by Dr Claire Guest, co-founder of Medical Detection Dogs, a Buckinghamshire charity, which found a 93 per cent reliability rate. "It is particularly exciting that we have such a high success rate in the detection of prostate cancer, for which existing tests are woefully inadequate," said Dr Guest. Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK, with more than 40,000 cases diagnosed every year. *D.Telegraph, 11 April 2015.*

- Dr Guest had her own story of canine diagnosis. For several days, her labrador Daisy jumped repeatedly at her, hitting her in the face and chest. “She carried on and on,” said Dr Guest. “I pushed her down and told her to stop and go for a run, which she did. But where she had hit me I found a lump.” Behind a benign cyst in her breast, there was a deep-seated early stage cancerous tumour. “It wouldn’t have been found, it was too deep to feel and I was only 46 so wouldn’t have had a routine mammogram for another four years,” she said. She had surgery and radiotherapy, and the cancer did not return. *D.Telegraph, 16 Aug 2014.*

- Helen Mason, who lives in Oxfordshire, was diagnosed with breast cancer aged 34 in August 2011 after her horse, Myrtle, repeatedly nudged her on the chest. “At the time of my diagnosis, I was feeling absolutely fine, but Myrtle had been repeatedly nuzzling up to my left side,” she said. “That in itself wasn’t strange, but Myrtle usually only nuzzled my right pocket, where I kept her treats. But for a few weeks or so, she nuzzled me whenever I saw her, nudging so hard that it hurt. As well as Myrtle’s nudges, I had some dimpling on the skin of my left breast and I thought I ought to get it checked out. Looking back, I think it was Myrtle’s nudges that encouraged me to go to my doctor.” Chemotherapy, a lumpectomy and radiotherapy appear to have worked. *D.Mail, 1 Sept 2015.*

- Laboratory tests at the University of Edinburgh have shown that Joy Milne, a 65-year-old nurse from Perth, is able to identify people with Parkinson’s disease just by sniffing T-shirts they had slept in. The grandmother of seven first detected a change in the odour of her late husband Les over two decades ago, which led to him being diagnosed with Parkinson’s. He died in 2014. “I’ve always had a keen sense of smell and I detected early on that there was a very subtle change in how Les smelled,” said Mrs Milne. “It was a heavy, slightly musky aroma. I had no idea that this was unusual and hadn’t been recognised before.” Parkinson’s affects 127,000 people in the UK – around one in 500 – leaving them struggling to walk, speak and sleep. The degenerative nervous system condition has no cure or definitive diagnostic test. Thanks to Mrs Milne’s nose, researchers are now studying 200 people to explore the olfactory aspects of the disease. It is thought that it causes a change in the sebum, an oily substance in the skin. *D.Mail, 22+23 Oct 2015.*

CHRIS JACKSON / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: Medical Detection Dogs Daisy and Wendy at a reception at St James’s Palace.

Mythconceptions

by Mat Coward

99: NO NOBEL

TNT
ALFRED NOBEL
NO-NOBEL MEDAL FOR HARD SUMS

The myth

The reason there isn’t a Nobel Prize for maths is because Alfred Nobel hated mathematicians, after one of their number stole his wife.

The “truth”

We can say with certainty that no number-botherer ever slept with Mr Nobel’s wife, because Mr Nobel was never married. He did have three long-term lovers in his life, but none of them left him for a mathematician, and no biographer has ever suggested that any of them were unfaithful to him with any mathematicians. The simplest answer to why there’s no maths Nobel seems to be that it’s a subject Alfred just wasn’t terribly interested in. If you think about it, almost *every* subject doesn’t have a Nobel Prize devoted to it – there’s no Nobel for History, or Biology, or Sitting Quietly and Reading While Miss Does Her Marking. There are only five Nobels: Physics, Chemistry, Medicine, Literature, and Peace. (Since 1969, economists have been eligible for The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, which is often colloquially referred to as the Nobel Prize for Economics, and is awarded alongside the true Nobels.) The reason there isn’t a maths prize is because there’s no particular reason why there should be; cuckoldry (for which there is no Nobel Prize, incidentally) doesn’t enter into the matter.

Sources

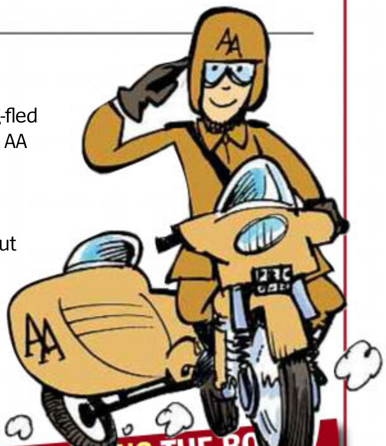
www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/facts/; http://download.bioon.com.cn/upload/201012/06/142010rtrweoy3zr2o2ocf.attach.pdf; www.todayifoundout.com/index.php/2010/10/the-reason-there-is-no-nobel-prize-for-mathematics-had-nothing-to-do-with-any-wifemistress-of-alfred-nobel/

Disclaimer

If our version doesn’t add up, then please use the letters page to help us figure it out.

Mythchaser

A nostalgic reader, recalling the long-fled days of his youth, remembers when AA (Automobile Association) patrolmen, perched on their motorcycles, were required to salute any vehicle which carried an AA membership badge. But is it true, he asks, that the salute was not an act of innocent politeness – but a warning that a police speed trap lay ahead? Could such criminally irresponsible behaviour really have been behind this quaint old tradition?



DON’T MISS MYTHCONCEPTIONS THE BO
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NECROLOG

This month, we salute the achievements of an Apollo astronaut, one of the 20th century's most influential psychiatrists and the abdominal showman who invented Gut Barging...

BINKIE BRAITHWAITE

The larger-than-life Binkie Braithwaite, self-proclaimed "Gutfather" and president of the World Gut Barging Association, was undoubtedly synonymous with the revival of the 17th century English martial art that he almost single-handedly plucked from obscurity and brought under the spotlight of the world media.

Which of course is nonsense. Gut Barging – in which two fat blokes go at each other "using the gut and no other part of the body" – was not a long-lost indigenous sport driven underground in Victorian times. It was, in fact, made up – largely in the hostelries of Bradford-on-Avon. But Braithwaite, a true eccentric and genuine trickster, managed to convince Japanese TV, Richard and Judy, Johnny Vaughan and the US *Tonight* programme's Jay Leno of its historical veracity.

After a previous career when he was "big in drains", Binkie began his tomfoolery with Henry Root-style letters, one of which he wrote to David Attenborough attesting that he had seen a giant albino porcupine in Wiltshire. In another impulsive ruse, he contacted the local paper to say he'd noticed a pattern of mould on his kitchen wall uncannily resembling the face of the late country singer Jim Reeves. When the newspaper's photographer squinted at the damp patch, saying "You just did that with a tea bag, didn't you?" Binky slapped him on the shoulder and, in typical fashion, boomed: "Oh, all right then! Let's have a Scotch!"

But the abdominal showman's finest fortean achievement was probably bringing his entirely fake Gut Barging to the Albert Hall, in an event reported in the *Independent* (14 June 1997). "Just over a year ago," enthused William Hartston, "few of us had heard of this ancient British recreation, but yesterday it completed a remarkable return to prominence with its first high profile international contest, 'The Brawl in the Hall'" – alongside The Stranglers, no less. "Anthropologically speaking," Binkie expounded, "one would have to place Barging somewhere between Sumo wrestling and the Peruvian territorial game of Dungwatt."

The revival only took off in earnest, he claimed, after he spoke of it to the *Indy* on 30 April 1996, though he had participated in the activity in his youth, and had devoted his adult life to "researching and promoting the art". During that time the sport's unofficial champion, "Mad Maurice the Belgian from Melksham" (whose mastery of the "Full Johnny Turk" is legendary), faced such fearsome opponents as Devon's "Chernobyl", "The Radiator", "The Organ Grinder" and, from Germany, "Helmut Kohlskuttle".

Bearded, imposing and Hagrid-like, Binkie was also co-ordinator of CAMDA (the Campaign to Abolish Morris Dancing Absolutely), conducted largely from behind the doors of the Dandy Lion pub, touching the zeitgeist while fuelled by a daily regime of Wadsworth's bitter.

But he will always be remembered, in West Wilts anyway, as a chaotic spirit, blagger, accidental humorist, and inventor of "a contest of skill and controlled violence" which "basically gives fat drunken people the opportunity to excel". You couldn't make it up.

Geoffrey Sargent (aka "Binkie Braithwaite") of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, abdominal showman, born 1955; died after a short illness 18 Nov 2015, aged 60.

Stephen Volk

EDGAR MITCHELL

Mitchell was the sixth of 12 humans to walk on the Moon. As part of the Apollo 14 mission (31 Jan – 9 Feb 1971), he spent more than nine hours on the Moon – the longest moonwalk in history – conducting experiments with his crewmate, Alan B Shepard Jr, with whom he collected 45kg (94lb) of Moonrock. In the days after the mission Mitchell told reporters that he had experienced an "epiphany" in space and returned with "an overwhelming sense of oneness, of connectedness". During the return journey to Earth, he secretly carried out experiments to see if recipients on Earth picked the same shapes that he was thinking about; apparently, one in four did.

Mitchell left NASA in 1972 and founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences, which aimed to support "individual and collective transformation through consciousness research". In 1974, he described his lunar epiphany to the *New York Times*: "It was a sense of the Earth being in critical condition, a recognition of the massive insanity which had led man into deeper and deeper crises on the planet. Above all, I felt the need for a radical change in our culture. I knew we were replete with untapped intuitive and psychic forces which we must utilise if we were to survive, forces that Western society had programmed us to disregard."

Mitchell – who grew up on a cattle ranch near Roswell, New Mexico – devoted much of his later life to studying the mind and unexplained phenomena. In 2008, he claimed that aliens had visited Earth and said he believed there was a government cover-up. "I happen to have been privileged enough to be in on the fact that we've been visited on this planet and the UFO phenomenon is real," he said. "It's been well covered up by all our governments for the last 60 years or so, but slowly it's leaked out and some of us have been privileged to have been briefed on some of it." Asked about the astronaut's unorthodox opinions, NASA said diplomatically: "Dr Mitchell is a great American, but we do not share his opinions on this issue."

Edgar Mitchell, astronaut, born Hereford, Texas, 17 Sept 1930; died West Palm Beach, Florida 4 Feb 2016, aged 85.

ROBERT SPITZER

Robert Spitzer has been described as one of the most influential psychiatrists of the 20th century. His doubts about the effective-

APOLLO 14
Mitchell
osa

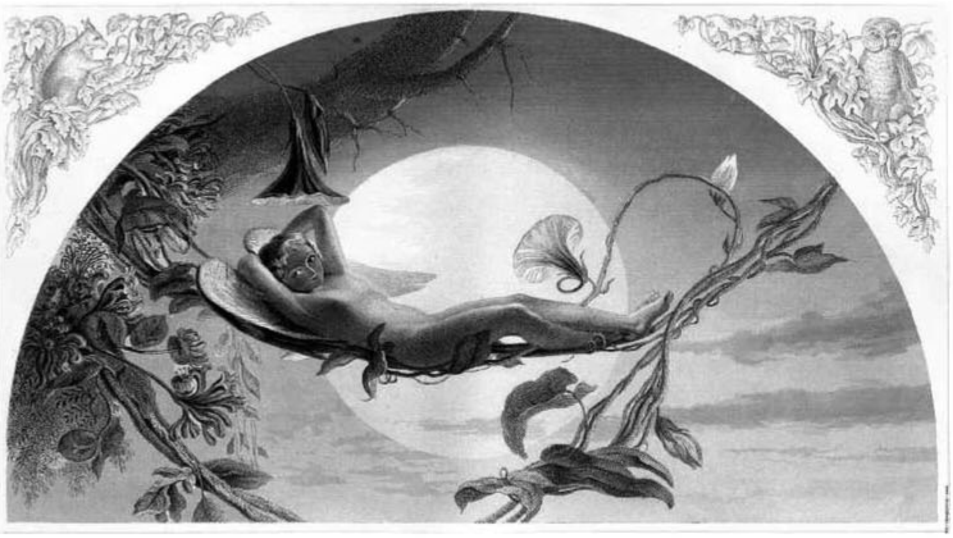
NASA / GETTY IMAGES

ness of Freudian psychoanalysis led him to attempt to put the diagnosis of mental disorders onto a more scientific basis, and during the 1970s he played a leading role in the transformation of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM*). This helped to give psychiatrists definitions of all of the major disorders so that they "could agree on what they were seeing", according to his wife and colleague, Janet Williams. *DSM-III* was published in 1980. Numerous disorders were defined for the first time: bipolar disorder, PTSD, attention deficit disorder, autism, anorexia nervosa, bulimia and panic disorder. Prior to its overhaul, the *DSM* was an obscure administrative handbook with 180 poorly defined mental disorders that left wide latitude for individual judgement and had very few readers. The chaos that once prevailed is exemplified by a 1949 study, which showed that three psychiatrists faced with a single patient at the same time, and given identical information, were able to reach the same diagnostic conclusion only 20 per cent of the time. A patient identified as a textbook hysteric by one shrink might easily by classified as a hypochondriac depressive by another. However, no subsequent major study was able to demonstrate a substantive improvement in diagnostic reliability following the publication of *DSM-III*.

Spitzer was lauded for removing homosexuality's classification as a "sociopathic personality disturbance" in 1973. He pressed for the change after meeting gay rights activists and determining that homosexuality could not be a disorder if gay people were comfortable with their sexuality. "A medical disorder either had to be associated with subjective distress, pain or general impairment in social function," he said.

Spitzer annoyed traditional psychoanalysts by removing the term "neurosis" from the *DSM*; alienated feminists by supporting the idea that in certain cases premenstrual tension could be classified as a mental illness, and infuriated the US Veterans Administration by including pot-traumatic stress disorder, which qualified huge numbers of soldiers for compensation.

Robert Spitzer, psychiatrist, born White Plains, New York 22 May 1932; died Seattle 25 Dec 2015, aged 83.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

GOATSUCKING HEDGEHOGS

In the late 19th century, natural history, under the crushing victories of Darwin, turned from being an art into a science. And one of the results of this shift was the public gutting of a series of quaint folk beliefs by men in white coats. Do swallows hibernate in ponds and the sea? No! Do hedgehogs pick up fruit on their spines to eat at a later date? No! (Interestingly, Darwin himself took the hedgehog cocktail sticks seriously.) Do snakes temporarily swallow their young to protect them? No! Do frogs and lizards sometimes take up residence in the human body? No! Do hedgehogs and nightjars suck milk from cows' and goats' udders? Absolutely not!

DO HEDGEHOGS PICK UP FRUIT ON THEIR SPINES TO EAT AT A LATER DATE? DARWIN TOOK THE IDEA SERIOUSLY.

Some traditionalists, shocked by the onslaught, tried to defend nostrums that they had grown up with. Typically, a septuagenarian would admit that, yes, swallows travelled south for the winter, but that just possibly some remained because he, as a boy, had once seen a swallow emerge from a pond and… No! No! No! repeated the men of science with increasing impatience. By 1900 these beliefs had become anti-orthodoxies and God help those foolish enough to defend them in a public place. Knowledge advances mercilessly, and to general benefit, but there is something unattractive about the bullyboy tactics used to establish new truths. It is with some satisfaction then that I recently discovered that one of these anachronistic pieces of rural lore may yet squeeze its way into the canon of natural history. Roger Stephens in his excellent *The Boom of the Bitterbump: The Folk-history of Cheshire's Wildlife* records a witness who had seen a hedgehog sucking at a cow. Roger, then, with references to Maurice Burton's *The Hedgehog*, establishes that: (i) hedgehogs can stand for some time on two feet (having shared a house with a hedgehog for a winter I can confirm this); that (ii) its mouth can open wide enough to chew on a teat; and that (iii) a hedgehog in captivity sucked on an artificial calf-feeding teat.

If all this is a bit much for our friends in white coats there is a less extreme scenario whereby the hedgehog takes up residence in a warm barn. It, then, approaches a cow's dripping udder and stands to lick the milk. In either case the hedgehog drinking from the cow deserves to be taken seriously. As such it can join a select few folk traditions that were initially rejected by science but that are now waiting in the ante-chamber of belief: so dippers *can* walk on the bottom of rivers; toads *do* survive for long periods in enclosed spaces; hedgehogs *will* sometimes steal milk from cows… Perhaps a Youtube video in 2018?

Simon Young writes on folklore and history and runs www.fairyist.com

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UFO CASEBOOK

JENNY RANDLES RE-EXAMINES BRITAIN'S BIGGEST AND MOST CONTROVERSIAL UFO CASE 35 YEARS ON

RENDLESHAM FOREST GENESIS PART FOUR

Events in Rendlesham Forest, Suffolk, confound our efforts to understand them. Between January-February 1981, when local researchers Brenda Butler and Dot Street first picked up tales from local folk, and October 1983, when the case went global, Rendlesham was known only to a handful of people. In this series I have gathered all my research from the early days.

We now know that a dozen USAF personnel, from ordinary airmen to a Lt Colonel, witnessed something on the nights of the 25-26 December and 27-28 December 1980. Years later, these witnesses spoke publicly about their experiences, often after they had retired. Today, their stories seem stranger than the modest versions in the understated Halt memo sent to the Ministry of Defence in mid-January 1981. Freedom of Information requests later supplied two January-dated statements by the airmen most involved on the first night (John Burroughs, Jim Penniston and Ed Cabansag), from which Halt supposedly compiled his memo, alongside supportive statements from two base security control personnel in contact during the events (Lt Buran and Sergeant Chandler).

Donald Moreland, the British Squadron Leader on base, dismissed the incident to me in January 1984 as just "a few lights" that had been resolved as the Orford Ness lighthouse; which reasonably leads sceptics to suspect that the modern witness accounts are exaggerations.

However, we know that major facts about physical evidence (trace casts, a live tape recording and electrical effects) are absent from the Halt report yet *were* documented five weeks after the sightings via a British radar officer. This alone establishes that the early documentation from the USAF is not definitive.

These two final parts will show how the testimony of the three main players in this case was always more detailed than those statements. Moreover, Penniston told Brenda, Dot and me in 1983 that they had "sanitised" the first reports to protect their careers and Burroughs confirmed to me in 1989 that by the next morning they had agreed to "tone them down a bit". Halt also showed circumspection. He confirmed to me in 1997 that he decided not to tell the MoD everything unless they came on base to investigate – which they never did. Moreland confirmed to me in 1984 that he was equally surprised that the memo was ignored.

Halt suspected the MoD was investigating before his memo, as Bentwaters tower had called RAF Watton on the night of the events. Two British men went to the landing site on 1 January 1981 and took plaster casts and asked questions of those present, but declined to identify themselves.

TARAS YOUNG

ABOVE: The East Gate of RAF Woodbridge, from where Penniston and Burroughs first saw the lights.

Halt told us this in 1983, but forestry officers also reported the presence of these two men independently after they received a visit from them that day. This was the day before the story was leaked to Brenda by base affairs officer 'Steve Roberts'. So, those two mysterious investigators were way ahead of the game. They were not reporters, since nothing appeared even locally before I briefly mentioned the case in an interview with the London *Evening Standard* in May 1981. It seems a reasonable supposition they were from the MoD – but nothing in UK government records supports that.

Burroughs's statement, a week after the events, reports that he and his sergeant were on patrol at Woodbridge, saw some lights fall into the forest and went out to investigate. From the edge of the wood they saw red and blue lights and a white beam. They called for assistance, and 10 minutes later Burroughs and two of an investigative security patrol (Penniston and Cabansag) drove off base, leaving weapons secured back at the gate. They headed down a logging track and into the woods pursuing the lights, which were still visible. At one point the report describes them hitting the ground as the lights manœuvred through trees and flew away. They also heard local animals go wild. After chasing the lights eastward for an hour, they lost the UFO and only saw a 'beacon light' identified by them as the lighthouse.

So, seven days after the events, Burroughs stated on record that he saw and recognised the lighthouse when closer to it (miles from where they first saw the UFO). Remember this when considering the theory that the UFO *was* the lighthouse. However, he did seem unaware there was a second beacon (the Shipwash lightship), not as bright and to the south. The forest here was transformed not long after the sighting, with thick tree cover being felled suddenly in early 1981. So when I first visited at night, the lighthouse was prominent, and you could easily see the lightship and a bank of red lights on the Ness radar connected with the old Cobra Mist site. Rendlesham was also devastated by the storm of November 1987.

Astronomer Ian Ridpath suggests that the airmen saw a bright meteor falling at 2.50am and once inside the woods mistook some lights for a UFO. As they walked towards the Ness and identified the lighthouse, what they assumed was the earlier UFO could have been the lightship. This seems logical; except that the lightship is not in the direction they describe. Plus, the meteor was in view for just seconds, so could not be what was later followed through the woods.

Penniston's report on 2 January 1981 was broadly similar but does not mention the lighthouse and calls the UFO a "mechanical object", which Burroughs never does. That he too saw the lighthouse is supported by the two Central Security Control officer statements, which confirm that he radioed through that the lights seemed "unlike anything seen in the area before". They added that Penniston got close to the "object" then became baffled because he found he had gone beyond it and could now see only the lighthouse beacon. This again supports the assertion that the confusion over time and space the men described was not a later addition. At 3.54am he was ordered back to base. Asked by control why the UFO could not just be the lighthouse, Penniston had stated: "Had you seen the other lights you would know the difference".

To this day, most people wrongly think the lighthouse solution was a product of the media publicity. Yet these many references in the original witness reports, 11 days before Halt sent his memo to the MoD (with no reference to that beacon), show otherwise. Frustratingly, had those statements been released from the start, a speedier investigation might have answered questions about what these beacons looked like from the site, which was no longer possible after the January 1981 tree-felling.

The third airman, Ed Cabansag, has always been less forthcoming, and his brief statement, written at the time, agreed with Burroughs that the "beacon light" was seen, but also concurred that it was different. Both Burroughs and Penniston have long said they protected Cabansag by claiming only the two of them were involved. Cabansag's reticence might support this. Penniston says Cabansag's statement was even more "sanitised" than his own.

Base commander Col Ted Conrad, who did the in-house investigation following the incidents, gave a mostly downplayed statement to my fellow *FT* columnist David Clarke in 2010, but noted how the base blotter was altered next morning by security police who had seemingly "decided to keep everything low key".

John Burroughs first gave me his personal account of the Rendlesham events when we met in Arizona in 1989.

He said that his supervisor was the first to see the lights over the forest and pointed them out. After driving their cruiser out of the east gate and down a logging track into the forest, they saw "one big light, low in the sky which fell" – perhaps the meteor – which as it dropped looked like fairy lights sprinkled in the middle of the wood, red and blue, with a white light growing in intensity. They both felt scared and decided to head back to the gatehouse and radio the security patrol. This was difficult, Burroughs recalls, because the desk sergeant thought it was a holiday prank and John admits he was "babbling" in shock and had to reassure base that they were serious.

Persuaded of Burroughs's sincerity, control sent Penniston out to the gate with Cabansag as his driver. Upon arrival, the two newcomers were shown the lights, which to Penniston had the look of a chemical fire. He had experience of accidents at his previous job at Alconbury, so took Burroughs through the checklist debrief procedures for an air crash. Burroughs kept insisting that nothing had crashed – it had landed, though inside a dense forest.

LEFT: Jim Penniston, who filed one of the earliest reports about the events of 25-26 December 1981.

Burroughs noted: "[Jim] saw the disbelief in our eyes. We were just trying to show him that something strange was going on." Penniston asked for radar to be checked, though he suspected they would see nothing, as the lights were deep in woods. Burroughs mentioned talk on base of a British exercise off the coast involving ships and aircraft and suggested maybe this was involved somehow. (Interestingly, I was later shown evidence by an MoD source that sailors on vessels in that exercise near Orford Ness were asked to stay below deck – one of the reasons I first suspected some kind of experiment might have been underway on the Ness.)

The three airmen now drove into the forest to investigate, but left the cruiser behind when the frozen, rutted ground made passage difficult. From the woods they saw what Penninston described to us in a 1994 interview as: "A mass of fluctuating light – like an aircraft engulfed in flames". Radio communication back to base was by now breaking up badly.

Burroughs headed toward the glow in the woods. It brightened, and they "hit dirt", as he put it, falling to the ground in a well-drilled "threat response". Penniston said that at this point "a definite form was emerging from the glow" and he was sure it was a craft of some sort, the size of a small tank and "very smooth like black glass." Burroughs only noted that "the lights seemed to get brighter and more defined. There was more colour behind them." He agreed that "it was sort of triangular but only vaguely solid… not sure it can be termed an object in that sense."

His memory of the next few minutes was affected by a strange feeling as they edged closer to the lights, as if "a wave of physical energy" washed over him. It was like static electricity, and made him feel as if "I was moving in slow motion and taking longer and longer to get nearer to the thing".

Penninston said that you could "feel it on your skin" and that everything went in slow motion "like time itself was an effort". He says the thing had "no 90 degree turns" on it and was like smoky glass that blended colours into each other with some marks or symbols "etched" into the surface.

Afterwards, they were confused about time and how long they had been out there: Burroughs thought a few minutes, Penniston maybe 20, base said almost an hour. Both recall the object disappearing, climbing upwards in a blur and vanishing in an explosion of light without any sound or feeling of air displacement and how the local animals went into panic, with deer running from cover and birds screeching.

Burroughs claimed that he looked to the south and saw the *lighthouse* blinking. But from their location the Ness was ahead of them, eastwards (where they chased the 'beacon light' and identified it as Orford lighthouse). The light to the south must have been the Shipwash lightship. If this comment to me in 1989 is accurate, they saw *both* lighthouse and lightship and thought *neither* was the UFO.

Another odd story not in the original statements concerns one of the men climbing on top of the UFO and freaking out. Why would such a major claim not appear there if it happened, unless it was a later elaboration *or* you accept that the reports were heavily sanitised?

Happily, we have evidence again from the early investigation. On 11 August 1983 – two months before the story was in the *News of the World* – and a few days before Brenda, Dot and I took the then-secret Halt report to the MoD in Whitehall under threat of arrest, Halt, still on base and soon to be promoted to full colonel and commander, was informed by us that his own country had now released his report. He was unhappy, saying he had been promised faithfully by the MoD that it would *never* be released. He appeared shocked during this conversation.

Eager to learn more, he agreed to tell us what he knew in exchange for our help in preventing the story going public – something that was out of our control. He said that the object reported by the three men on the first night was triangular with three legs and that it came in along the coast during his own experience. On that first night, he said, "three men went out toward it" and "one of the three tried to climb on top of it" but that as he did "it rose off the ground" and they chased it through the forest. That man was so shocked they had a hard time getting him back to reality and his friends had to take blankets and food out to him in the woods as he would not leave for ages. "I was worried about him," Halt said.

He could, of course, have been spinning a yarn, though this claim matched things other witnesses later reported about seeing an airman in tears on the edge of the forest. I have no idea if this really did happen and, if it did, who this man was. You could interpret some of the testimony of Burroughs and Penniston as suggesting missing recall of things that happened during the close encounter phase, but neither claimed to have stayed in the woods; and Cabansag, from what little he has said, is not obviously the man who climbed on the object either. So we are at an impasse.

In the final part, I will look at one last piece of early evidence and examine the MoD's involvement with the Rendlesham case.

THE EYE-SPY TEDDIES OF ALBANIA

Protective traditions intended to ward off the power of the 'evil eye' are found throughout history and all over the world, but do they morph and adapt to the events of recent history? **JOHN BILLINGSLEY** travelled to Albania, where he found scarecrows and rams' horns displaced by cuddly rabbits and tatty teds – soft toys united in a struggle against the social changes wrought by capitalism...

The 'evil eye' is a traditional concept, found across most of the world and generally associated in the popular mind with magic and witchcraft. The basic idea is simple: the eyes have the power to transmit tangible effects at a distance, and the 'evil eye' is the negative application of that power. This is one of those notions familiar in traditional worldviews, and to a rationalistic culture seems insubstantial and unscientific, and therefore probably imaginary. Nonetheless, even in materialist cultures there persists a popular belief that some gazes can literally convey power or meaning. We all probably have personal experience of someone looking at us in a way – sensual, mesmerising or hateful – that threw us off balance and might even have changed our behaviour in some manner. Some people, moreover, seem more able to exert such influence than others – the classic example would be Medusa, whose gaze was literally petrifying.

JORGE1767

Is such a power evidence of witchcraft or magical power? If someone's eyes can project intent or feeling in some way, and plenty of people will say they can, is this a supernatural phenomenon, or part of our natural experience? Is it some kind of etheric transmission? Or is it just the way some eyes are made, and any effect a psychological reaction of the recipient? Most of us would probably concur with the idea that the eyes are 'the windows of the soul', and that such gazes offer a glimpse into the inner personality, where emotions ranging from love to resentment seethe. And it is in this deeper psychology that the evil eye is to be found and, where possible, averted.

THE EVIL EYE LURKS AT THE CUSP OF SUPERNATURAL AND RATIONAL CONTEXTS

The evil eye, or the idea of some innate power in a gaze, lurks at the cusp of supernatural and rational contexts. It is widely perceived as an empirical reality, but has no empirical foundation. But while rationalists may insist any negative effect from someone's gaze is unlikely, traditions have sprung up to protect against such a possibility, and continue to be popularly observed.

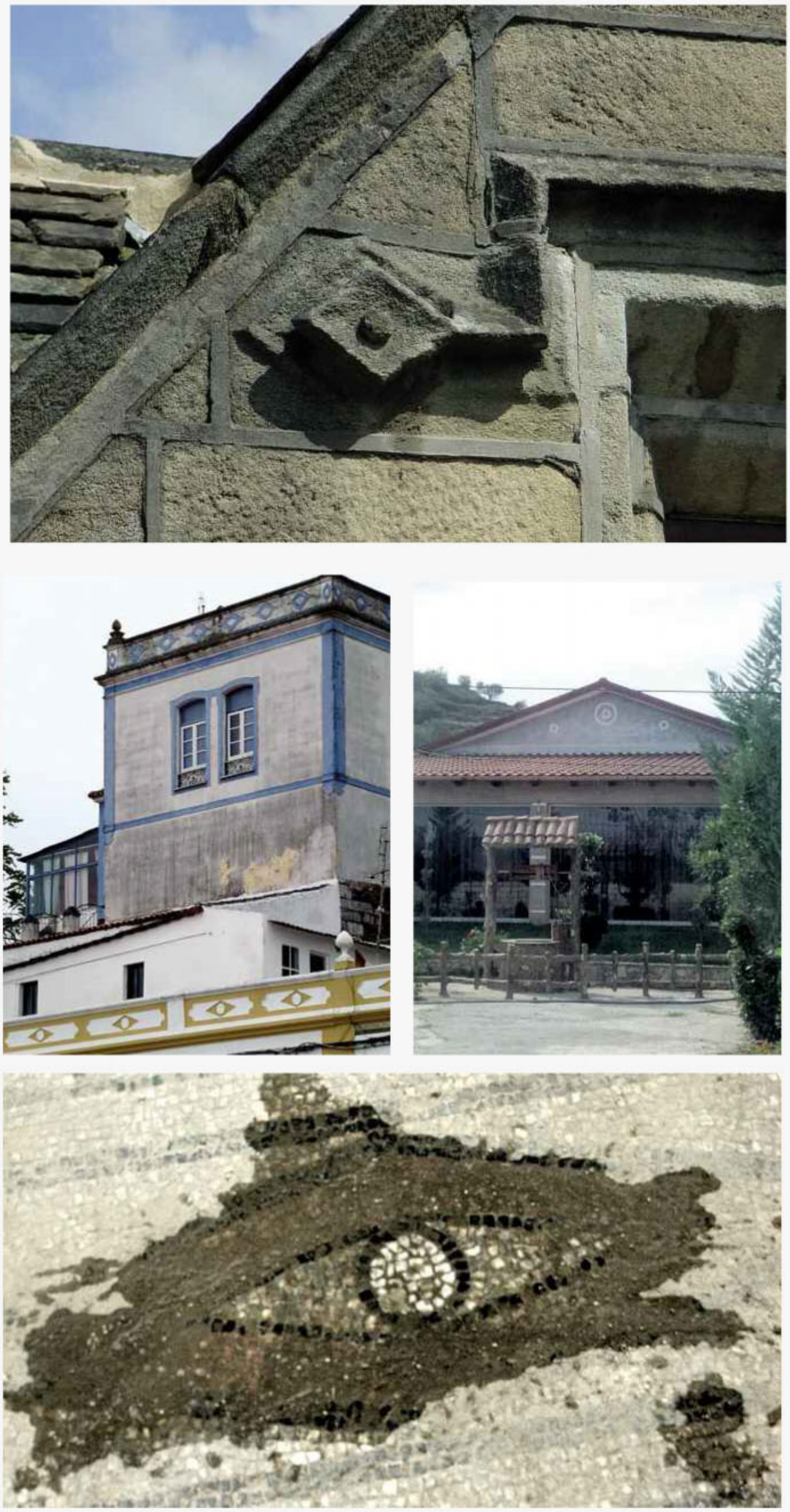
A recent news article about a new kind of amuletic tradition in Albania attracted my attention just a fortnight before I was headed there.[1] It gave me something else to look out for and to think about – something that was not just curious in itself, but also a touch absurd, and all to do with modern testimonies of the evil eye.

ABOVE: Traditional evil eye amulets hanging from a tree in Cappadocia, Turkey. **FACING PAGE:** A boy looks up at a teddy bear and a string of garlic hung from a new building in Kuc, near Tirana, Albania.

GENT SHKULLAKU / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

EVIL EYES IN ARCHITECTURE

The illustrations here, clockwise from top, show carvings targeting the evil eye on a farmhouse in Mythholmroyd, West Yorkshire, compared to analogues in Belesh, Albania, in a moisaic from Roman Libya, and on a building in Beja, Portugal. This geographical range indicates the wide currency and longevity of both the belief and measures against it.



PHOTOS: JOHN BILLINGSLEY

WITHERING LOOKS

Notions of the evil eye, and traditions to ward off its toxic effects, are widespread throughout the Old World, and have a long history. It is customary to count Pliny in AD 77 as the first documented mention of such beliefs. [2] Although this refers specifically to eyes with two pupils, it highlights a common theme throughout the tradition – that if your eyes have something odd or noticeable about them – for example, if they're crossed, if you have a wandering eye, a cast or squint, pupils of different colours, even if you have conjoined eyebrows – then you're likely to be suspected of having a questionable glance. [3]

Popular assumptions in the UK generally associate the evil eye with malevolent witchcraft. This implies that the evil eye is deliberate, even cultivated; but this is not necessarily so. A Yorkshireman who wished no harm to his neighbours is recorded in the early 19th century as directing his first glance each day at a pear tree, thus dissipating the toxic effect; in time, the pear tree withered away, but presumably no humans did. Another Yorkshireman with this affliction developed a habit of directing his gaze at the ground and never meeting another person's eyes, nor indeed of looking at his children.[4] By extension, this power of overlooking or forespeaking, as it was known, could be applied, accidentally or deliberately, to anything, child or cow or home or spouse, and no good would come of it. Typically, the victim of such a 'withering look' would suffer a wasting ailment such as depression or tuberculosis, or his business might decline. When such illnesses hit, a cause would be sought that would encompass both deliberate curses and innocent compliments (while deflecting blame from the nearest and dearest, note).

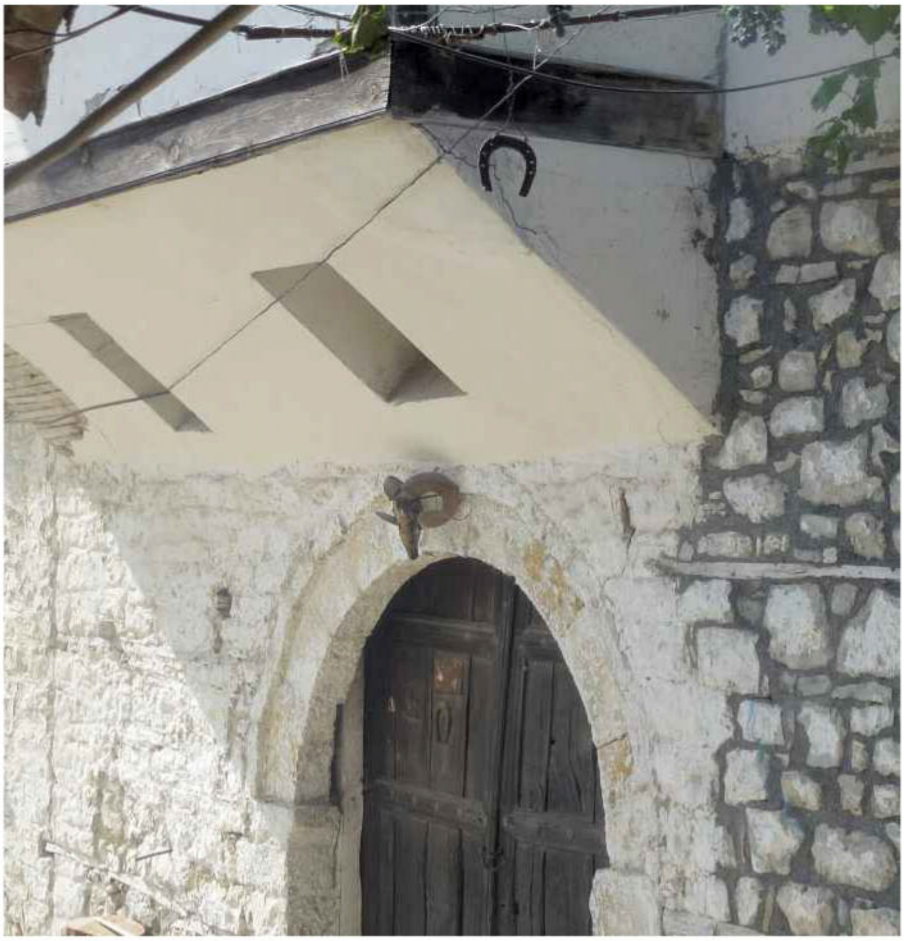
Intentional or not, the potential negative impact of a glance was a familiar part of life, and there were certain behaviours which made people uneasy. Confusingly, ill-wishing, or the suspicion of it, could also be generated by overt well-wishing. Showing too much care or attention to a child not of your family, or complimenting another's good fortune, or indeed paying more than passing attention to any item of belongings, is frowned upon in many cultures. In such cases, the mistrust is that the solicitude or praise is a front for envy, which is resentful and covetous, and thus poisonous; this is well known as a frequent feature of witchcraft allegations of the 17th century. However, in such cases the dynamic behind the toxic effect is not witchcraft, but the astringency of envy. [5]

The same anxiety that someone congratulating your good fortune may actually be conferring harm counsels against loudly declaring or showing off one's success or pleasure, in case it attracts the envious eye; implicitly, it recommends modesty and cautions against flaunting one's good fortune. This notion is founded in the idea of 'limited good' proposed by George Foster in 1965 as a constituent of many traditional cultures: that there is only so much good luck or health to go around in a community, and that some people get more than their fair share, thereby depriving others and inviting resentment from those who feel hard done by.[6] Thus, poorer sectors of society tend to be suspected of harbouring the evil eye, while the 'lucky ones, often the aspirational or middle class, may be suspected by the disadvantaged to be greedily employing unfair means to corner the luck market.[7]

This double-bind of envy appeared tellingly in 17th-century Britain, where strict individualistic and mercantile Protestantism was making headway; as the country moved from a 'post-peasant' rural economy that we might describe as shared deprivation towards a situation where differences in wealth were more apparent, and justified as God's reward for hard work and thrift, the potential for resentment naturally grew, and property – now increasingly private – needed protecting. The Pennine yeomen whose success in the textile trade showed in the 'Great Rebuilding' of the 17th century, replacing wood-framed houses with stone-built quasi-halls, employed a broad repertoire of amuletic devices on their new houses, from stone heads to lozenges and roundels that are clearly symbolically aimed at repelling the evil eye.[8] There was little that showed wealth better than a substantial stone house, so the owners (successful clothiers) would surely have been aware of the envy they were potentially inviting, hence their resort to traditional protective rituals. The unholy mix of the new Christian fundamentalism and self-righteousness, coloured with a tinge of yeoman guilt and real poverty, fuelled the fear of quasi-magical resentment at the same time as it used folk-magical symbolism to resist it [9] – a classic bind that not only stoked the witchcraft mania of the 17th century, but also established a connection in this country between the evil eye and witches, even though the underlying ethos was to deflect envy.

In the Middle East, the association of the evil eye with envy is explicit, and recognised by religion. In the Judaic Mishnah, the 'evil eye' is a situation where someone with a powerful gaze cannot bear with equanimity another's good fortune, while the Talmud affirms that some people have this kind of baneful power and notes a number of superstitious practices to ward off the effects.[10] *The Jewish Encyclopaedia* defines 'evil eye' as "a supposed power of bewitching or harming by spiteful looks attributed to certain persons as a natural endowment".[11] Islam follows much the same line: "The Arabic word *al-'ayn* (translated as the evil eye) refers to when a person harms another with his eye. It starts when the person likes a thing, then his evil feelings affect it, by means of his repeated looking at the object of his jealousy".[12] Judaism, Islam and Orthodox Christianity all concur that some kind of ritual, preferably conducted by priests, is required to cancel its effects.

The evil eye was also recognised in ancient Greece and Rome,[13] and persists in Mediterranean countries (in North Africa and the Middle East through religious reinforcement, in S European contexts through traditional 'limited good' beliefs), so it is no surprise that the Balkan countries, sandwiched between Italy, Greece and the old Ottoman Empire, should hold to this tradition strongly.



THE DORDOLEC IS A KIND OF HOMEMADE SCARECROW AT THE TOP OF A HALF-FINISHED BUILDING

ABOVE: Traditional protective devices in Berat, Albania: ram's horns and a suspended horseshoe. **BELOW:** The old meets the new: a string of garlic and a cuddly frog at a guesthouse in Valbona.

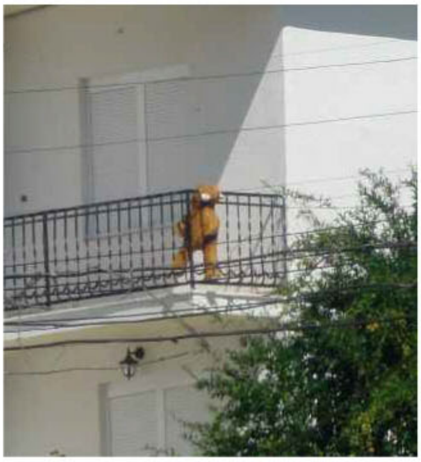
PHOTOS: JOHN BILLINGSLEY

MONKEYS AND SCARECROWS

Albanians use traditional protective devices at thresholds that are familiar in other countries: strings of garlic, rams' horns, and less often horseshoes and roundels. These are generally located above main doorways, though I saw garlic deployed anywhere across the frontage. The Albanian national flag of a two-headed eagle also seems to have an ambiguous function of this sort. In addition, there is the *dordolec*, a kind of scarecrow, typically home-made and close to life size, that is on familiar ground when protecting a vegetable patch, but less so when placed at the top of a half-finished building; one I saw near Lushnje was dressed, scarily enough, in jihadist guise. The *dordolec*, in my brief experience, is understandably most common in agricultural districts, and is visually explicable; but sometimes in a new building it is accompanied by the foundation sacrifice of a lamb or rooster, and interment of certain other objects.[14] Here, we are again at the cusp of the material and the magical – the scarecrow, in superficially resembling a human figure, gives a marauder, human or avian, the corner-of-the-eye sense of being observed, leading to the 'better safe than sorry' expedient of moving on. The sacrifice and concealed objects speak to a more magical conception of threat.

Then there is another, much more contemporary and often quite bizarre manifestation of the tradition – what Elizabeth Gowing calls the *majmune* (monkey),[15] and which Kristin Peterson-Bidoshi refers to as *kukull* (doll). This, too, appeared more common in rural districts – villages and outlying houses – but both Gowing and Peterson-Bidoshi observed it in the suburbs of Tirana. The *kukull* is where an absurd element creeps in, being most often a shop-bought soft toy, sometimes, but not by any means mostly, a monkey; the most common form is a teddy bear. Taken together, these items represent in a bizarre fashion both the persistence of tradition and its changeability in response to external impulses.[16] What they are primarily aimed at, the evil eye, has a variety of local dialect terms reflecting local understandings.[17]

Albania has been somewhat battered by political fortunes over the centuries. Its Christianity – Orthodox and Roman Catholic – was displaced during its 525 years as part of the Ottoman Empire (1388-1913), during which time political incentives led to Albanians accepting Islam in greater numbers than their Balkan neighbours, except in the north of the country. The more familiar protectives of animal horns, garlic and horseshoes are shared with practices in neighbouring countries, and as ingrown traditions would seem independent of the religious differences.



ABOVE: A protective ted on duty in Berat.

A turbulent period through the World Wars was succeeded in 1944 by one of the most austere and authoritarian Communist regimes known, which in 1990 collapsed. Throughout, Albania and Albanians were held back, economically and culturally. With the elections of 1991, the country began to experience capitalist democracy, and a sudden inrush of inequalities; the instability of the profit motive was underlined in 1997 by the collapse of pyramid schemes – in which the government was believed to have been implicated – that had caused $1.2bn losses among the population of 3 million. In the subsequent uprising the government was toppled, official buildings were destroyed, many people died, and UN intervention was needed to restore calm and wrest political control back from the organised criminal gangs that had taken control of a number of towns.

At some point during this period, the traditional protectives against the evil eye – against the covetous and the ill-inclined – didn't do the work they were supposed to do. So a typical tradition-versus-modernism crisis was generated in Albanians of all religious persuasions – should the old ways be abandoned, or updated to fit the new circumstances?

If we are to assume that long-standing

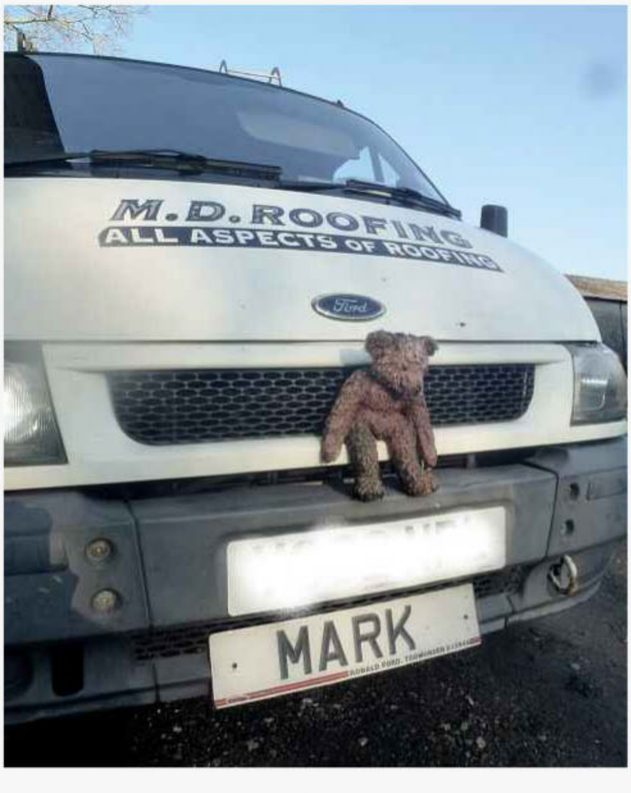
GRILLED TEDDY BEARS

One protective tradition can be found closer to home in Britain – but could tatty, truck-riding teddy bears be falling victim to local councils 'professionalism'?

The teddy tradition is not unknown in Western contexts. In Britain and the USA, at least, soft toys have been deployed on the front grilles of trucks and lorries. Many of us of a certain age may recall when refuse collection lorries in Britain would frequently have a tawdry teddy bear or similar sorry soft toy tied to the radiator grille or somewhere on the cab. When was the last time you saw one? Somewhere along the line these seem to have disappeared from British rubbish trucks. Which regulation did they manage to offend, I wonder: hygiene, professional deportment of council vehicles, or what? They may, however, still be a feature of US garbage trucks, as the fate of Lotso, the conniving pink strawberry-scented teddy bear of the *Toy Story* franchise, suggests – his last scene in *Toy Story 3* (2010) is strapped to the front grille of a garbage truck.[1]

It's not just trash trucks that abuse (or honour?) soft toys in this way, though; it's something found across commercial vehicles, though again in the UK in decreasing numbers; mostly in working-class occupations and on vehicles owned independently,[2] which is unsurprising in that they also individualise or personalise a vehicle (something unacceptable to corporate ideas of self-presentation).

I asked a local Hebden Bridge builder, Mark, why he'd put a teddy on his van. "Well, it's something to do with good luck, isn't it, so they say... but this one, my wife was chucking it into the skip, and I didn't have the heart..." So – luck, rescue, sentiment: all positive messages to the world.



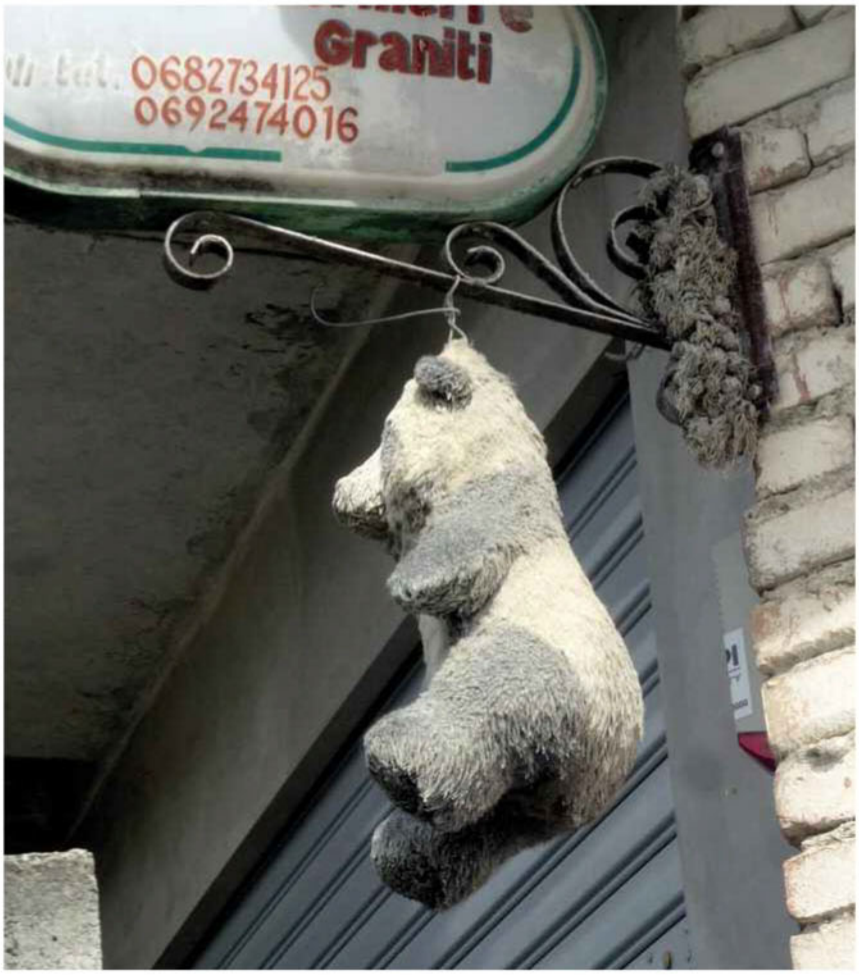
The grille or cab location certainly broadly conforms with the typical threshold locations of other protective and amuletic devices like the horseshoe. Perhaps these mascot toys are modern counterparts to the mixture of ornament and protection found in the decoration of working horses and carts, the historic equivalent of the commercial lorries. Mark's synthesis of luck and sentiment also echoes the poignancy of the Albanian teddy tradition, while giving rise to a visual dichotomy – can a business really be successful when its leading image is so tatty? This dichotomy, as well as the chuckle that such homely objects raise, helps dispel any incipient envy.

PHOTOS: JOHN BILLINGSLEY

NOTES

1 See *New York Times*, 13 Nov 2005: www.nytimes.com/2005/11/13/nyregion/theyre-soft-and-cuddly-so-why-lash-them-to-the-front-of-a-truck.html

2 Remember the rubber duck strapped to Kris Kristofferson's grille in the 1978 film *Convoy*?



JOHN BILLINGSLEY

ABOVE: A soft toy panda suspended in front of a shop entrance in Belesh, Albania.

Albanian quasi-peasant culture was not eradicated by Ottoman or Communist influence, but continued as innate conservatism or as a mark of extra-State identity (as appears likely even today), then we must assume that the idea of limited good probably still held some influence in the Albanian mind-set upon the collapse of Communism. The antithesis of limited good, the free-for-all of consumer capitalism that replaced it, must have been an exciting enticement; but for a population new to democracy, consumer capitalism, and indeed modern economics, it must also have been rather bewildering. Perhaps this explains the popularity of the pyramid schemes that were, astonishingly, encouraged at all levels from the government downwards. The logic of their inevitable failure simply was not available to a populace lacking modern economic experience – if the elected government, who presumably had some expertise in this area, seemed to back such schemes, surely it was with good cause? Eventually, of course, it became obvious that the schemes brought great benefit to a few, but greater hardship to many, and their collapse ushered in a situation where the greedy, amoral few again benefited at others' expense, and those with little enough found themselves with even less. Traditional protectives – horseshoes, horns, garlic – didn't work against this kind of threat; they might perform in a world where cause and effect were less substantial, but faced with a secular materialist acquisitiveness that had been less apparent in more communitarian social contexts, they were out of their depth.

PROTECTION AGAINST THE EVIL EYE DEPENDS ON DEFUSING ENVY AND RESENTMENT

So it seems an 'upgrade' option was chosen. To combat the evil eye of consumer capitalism, and in some cases to supplement their more magical predecessors, selected goods of that materialist culture had to play a role. This can be seen as a classic example of tradition updating itself, and also reflects changing perceptions the world over: as worldviews drift away from magical agency, the oblique protection offered by such amulets as garlic and animal horns loses relevance, and even though the basic stimulus of envy is as old as ever, a

EVIL EYE ONLINE

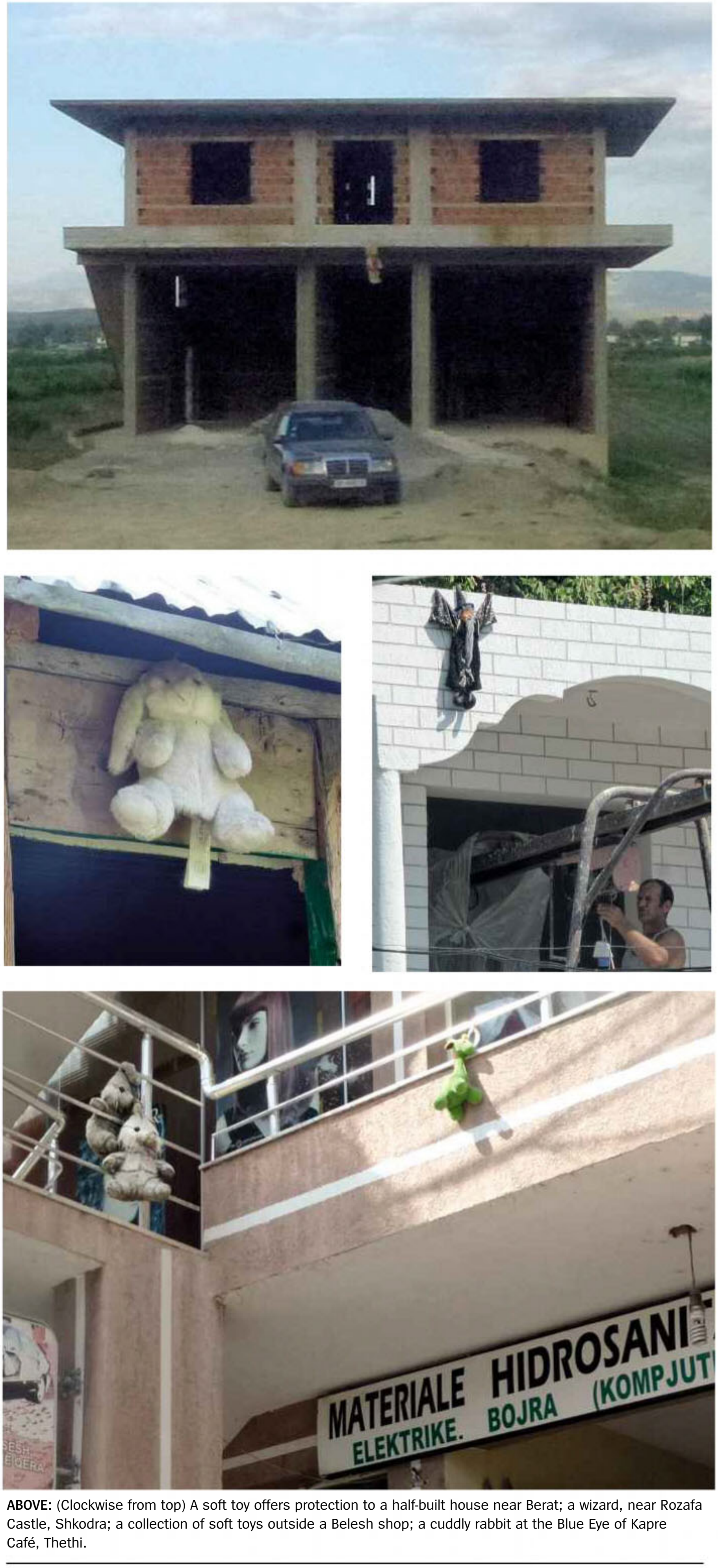
Two unlovely features of modern online behaviour are trolling and snarking, especially via social networking sites. These attacks on individuals generally include threats, vilification, vitriolic slander, death wishes and other forms of bullying abuse. For most of us, social constraints as well as personal inhibitions would prevent us from saying such things to a person face-to-face; the Internet offers the opportunity, however, to deliver bile anonymously, the sender delighting in a private and apparently random missile of hate. It may not be anything personal, so to commit the crime in the first place, the victim is often 'depersonalised' in some way; Internet anonymity facilitates the impersonality of communication and helps the troll evade empathetic reflection. The abstract expectation of shock and the unpredictability of the reaction to it, rather than real personal impact, may comprise the troll's anticipated payback.

Often, the trigger for such hate communications would appear to be someone's good fortune, or their espousal of a cause, their self-confidence to 'stand up and be counted'. There are people who really don't like other people being more fortunate, socially adept or intelligent than them, and their response is to try and undermine these personal plusses. Their vitriol, if it takes effect, manifests in some decline in the recipient's health.

Herein lies a parallel with the evil eye of tradition. Trolls and snarks are triggered by envy of another's life and benefits; their posts can sometimes be couched in barbed praise, or initially in superficial friendliness. Their 'envenomed exhalations' can lead, perhaps particularly in younger inexperienced recipients, to problems like depression or a retreat from social contact, and occasionally even suicide – in other words, the kind of 'wasting' ailments referred to in testimonies concerning witchcraft and the evil eye.

Traditions have built up around the knowledge that envy – often felt towards a set of circumstances and triggered fairly randomly by some ill-timed incident – can have a poisonous dynamic, and protective charms and objects have emerged to protect individuals, homes and businesses in the real world. But there is no concrete entity that can be protected in the virtual reality of the Internet world – no horseshoe can be hung up on our online threshold.

If we can understand the Internet troll through the perspective of traditional evil eye folklore, can this monster be challenged through similar folkloric application? Here is a challenge tailor-made for good-willed geeks, worldwide-witches and silicon shamans. Can we concoct an amuletic device that lurks within the screen and the network connection, right at the threshold of our online life, baring its teeth at the portal of the string of numbers that denotes our online home?



PHOTOS: JOHN BILLINGSLEY

ABOVE: (Clockwise from top) A soft toy offers protection to a half-built house near Berat; a wizard, near Rozafa Castle, Shkodra; a collection of soft toys outside a Belesh shop; a cuddly rabbit at the Blue Eye of Kapre Café, Thethi.

more literal artefact is drafted in to meet contemporary experience. It is in keeping with the *dordolec* scarecrows and with the wider folklore of dolls that the most appropriate symbols of Western capitalism, which also overlapped with existing tradition, were soft toys. It is also of note in the contemporary context that, unlike the *dordolec*, the soft toys are mass-produced consumer items. Absurd they may seem, but in their context they make a good kind of sense.

How new is this tradition? Gowing reported a householder "and everyone else I ask[ed]" as saying that "using soft toys against the eye started only in the 1990s "with democracy", but I believe it more likely that the stimulus for the new tradition was the collapse of the pyramid schemes and the resultant anarchy; the new tradition speaks directly to the inherent absurdity in the capitalist logic of unlimited good.

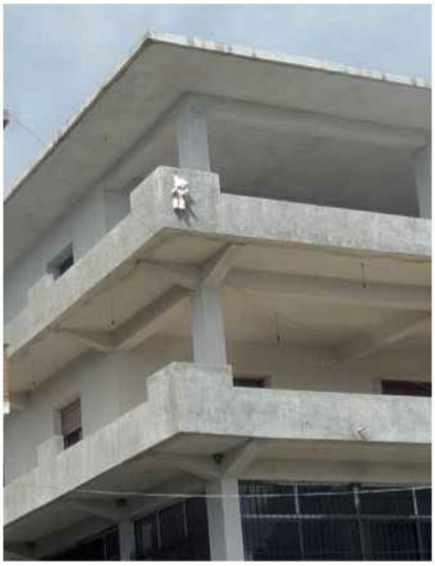
ABSURDITY EMBODIED

Kukull come in a variety of guises. Although Gowing cites the word *majmune* (monkey), this may be a localised usage, perhaps reflecting availability at the time the new tradition began. There is evidently no specific type of animal recommended for protection against the evil eye. In eight days of travel, I saw teddy bears, frogs, rabbits, deer, donkeys, dogs, a peasant wife, Bugs Bunny (tied to a pillar like a sacrificial victim), Moomin, Eeyore, Snoopy, Father Christmas and an unfamiliar one-eyed children's cartoon character. In addition, on the balcony of a new house in Shkodra, where builders were engaged below, was a wizard figure, neatly bridging the child's plaything with its magical forebears.

It's a shock to see one's first apotropaic teddy bear. Already an incongruous concept – the cuddly toy battling malice – the locations frequently enhance the incongruity. A brand-new three-storey furniture showroom near Prizren in ethnically Albanian (and more prosperous) Kosovo was one of the oddest, with a 3ft teddy strapped to the glass frontage at the upper-second-floor level. Another was a similar-sized bear dangling from a long cord above the petrol pumps on a garage forecourt near Lushnje, Albania. They tallied however with general preference for a front threshold location – a number of *kukull* were placed in the classic apotropaic position preferred by the traditional objects, over the main door, but others appeared on balconies, strapped to drainpipes, or outside shops. Generally, they seem to occupy first-floor locations; this is probably because in Albanian houses, the ground floor is typically used for utilitarian purposes like stores, utility rooms or garages, and the home proper begins above this space. Occasionally, they can be seen strapped to a projecting steel rod on the top floor of an unfinished building, though this is more commonly the haunt of a *dordolec* scarecrow. Wayside cafés in the north, on hiking trails and not occupied residentially, had *kukull* suspended around seating areas.

Travelling between the mountainous north and south-central Albania, both *kukull* and *dordolec* appeared to be more numerous towards the south, and relatively scarce in the north. Many were apparent in the agricultural region around Lushnje, known as Albania's breadbasket, especially in and around the villages of Fier Shegan and Belesh – in the former, perhaps 30-40 per cent of roadside houses had *kukull*. These were complete and occupied residences – but many dolls and scarecrows, as noted, are to be seen on unfinished buildings, whether residential, commercial or industrial. With the country remaining poor, and economic prospects currently limited, many Albanians work abroad, building up the capital to purchase land and build their own homes; these are constructed bit by bit, and in the interim, and absence of their owner, the dolls do their work. This testifies to a sense of acute economic vulnerability among Albanians of this post-collapse period, as the protected locations frequently seem unlikely to excite envy; the stimulus for many is surely to protect what little they have managed to accrue.

Rural agricultural districts yielded the most examples of *kukull* in my experience, and town centres the fewest – though researchers attest their frequent presence in the suburbs of Tirana and other towns (around one in eight houses in Gowing's report).[18] Gowing noted them on a variety of types of architecture, but I found them to be infrequent on modern apartment buildings, suggesting an association with discrete personal ownership.



JOHN BILLINGSLEY

ABOVE: Teddy on a half-finished building, Belesh;

THE FATE OF THE TED

Wherever a *kukull* or *dordolec* is deployed, it is invariably outdoors, open to the elements. Scarecrows can handle this better than soft toys, which soon become very sorry spectacles indeed – the panda outside a workshop in Belesh was by far the sorriest of all. These things do nothing to improve the appearance of the home or shop; they are not appealing or cuddly, and they are not only incongruous, but plain ugly. So what's going on?

One reason is that *kukull* may be considered the antithesis of bling. Bling is showing off, designed and employed to attract attention and instil a sense of envy in the beholder. Generally it is found on those who appear well able to take care of themselves, and have no need to fear resentment – like gangsters or hip-hop stars. An isolated cottage or deserted workshop needs a different strategy.

Protection against the evil eye depends on defusing envy and resentment, on concealing one's wealth; and frequently it works by deflecting attention, making people look the other way. A rich man can more easily pass unidentified by dressing as an unlovely tramp. This is how the modern custom works – a dirty, sodden, faded soft toy certainly attracts the eye, but turns the viewer's attention off. It offers nothing to covet, but by then the gaze has passed, interest has waned. As in the scarecrow tradition, and underscoring the link between the two protectives, the would-be marauder has moved on. Alternatively, the soft toy may work upon sentiment, to distract by striking a poignant note in a culture that values family life highly.[19] Either way, as it ages, the child's consumer item, in theory at least, turns in on itself, declaring itself – and by implication its owner's assets – the forgotten junk it is destined to become anyway.

The 1990s were a time of re-evaluating Albanian identities, including the country's traditions,[20] and were a crucial backdrop to the resurgence and revision of evil eye customs. John Roberts has argued, reasonably, that the evil eye becomes prominent in a culture when the society produces goods that can be envied and high levels of inequity exists in the distribution of these goods. This succinctly describes the Albania of the 1990s, and is no less relevant today.[21]

The *kukull* is not a tradition that came in with democracy, but with capitalism and, implicitly, globalisation, as a local adaptation to unfamiliar forces that were and remain beyond local control. In reflecting a global socio-economic change, the evolution of local apotropaic emblems also reflects the global shift in mindset in recent centuries.

Albania's replacement of garlic with teddies codifies a shift away from the subtle and magical, implying a traditional world of unseen forces that have their own implicit logic, towards the literal and materialist, where negative intent can be far from implicit and all too manifest.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JOHN BILLINGSLEY has written on the history and folklore of West Yorkshire and Japan. He has been closely involved with the earth mysteries and antiquarian scene for over 30 years, and edits a leading journal in that field.

NOTES

1 Elizabeth Gowing, "The troubleshooting teddies of Tirana", www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-33718522. See also **FT332:11**.

2 Iona Opie & Moira Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, OUP 1993, p144.

3 That's why in Mediterranean countries one sees amulets with a prominently blue-eyed image; the local inhabitants don't have blue eyes, so the amulets are aimed at North European types, strangers who might bring all sorts of mayhem; similarly, 'dark-eyed strangers' are looked at askance in Northern Europe).

4 John Harland & TT Wilkinson, *Lancashire Folk-lore*, EP 1973 (1882), p69. E & M.A. Radford, *Encyclopaedia of Superstitions*, Hutchinson 1969, p155.

5 Although this does not quite explain why some evil eyes blight their own property, a circumstance suggestive of an independent daimonic presence. Alan Dundes offers an interesting theorisation on the evil eye as a lethal desiccating agent, against liquid representing life, in "Wet & Dry, the Evil Eye", in Alan Dundes (ed.), *The Evil Eye*, pp257-312.

6 George M Foster, "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good", *American Anthropologist* 67, 1965, pp293-315.

7 Such as magic. Curiously, according to Foster (p307), benefits acquired through luck or fate – which exist *outside* the community – are accepted. New Age circles in the developed world propose a contradiction of both worldviews in their ideas of unlimited good that can be accessed by focused thought. It is no coincidence that the country where evil eye beliefs seem least popular is the USA.

8 Other protections in this area included glass spheres whose reflective surface deflected the gaze, or glass walking sticks filled with colourful 'hundreds and thousands' beads, which attracted the attention, i.e. away from anything valuable.

9 Indeed, a mummified cat was found in the roof of a 17th-century section of St Thomas a Becket Church, Heptonstall. It took a while for the crusade against alleged witchcraft to embrace traditional folk magic.

10 www.myjewishlearning.com/article/evil-eye-in-judaism/; http://thejewishreview.org/worldofjudaism/?id=214

11 Vol 5, p280.

12 http://islamqa.info/en/20954. Elsewhere on this site, however, it is said that the use of amulets is forbidden (http://islamqa.info/en/11359) and also – perhaps speciously – that the full veil is also a precaution against the covetous evil eye.

13 A clear statement comes in the third century, in the fictional work *Aethiopica* by Heliodorus of Emesa (who is actually mocking one of the extant theories): "When anyone looks at what is excellent with an envious eye, he fills the surrounding atmosphere with a pernicious quality and transmits his own envenomed exhalations into whatever is nearest to him" (quoted by CJS Thompson, *The Hand of Destiny*, Rider 1932, p66).

14 Kristin Peterson-Bidoshi, "The *Dordolec*: Albanian house-dolls and the evil eye", *Journal of American Folklore* 119, 2006, pp337-355, p347-8. Ion Talos, an Albanian historian, noted that formerly a human head was an obligatory propitiation of the *genius loci*.

15 Which my Albanian guide did not recognise as a term for these objects.

16 A possible precursor to this development may be a Czech tradition recorded c.1600 of hanging "a small studded arrow and a doll" of blackthorn at the stable door – a troublesome spirit was expected to play with these rather than bother the livestock. Claude Lecouteux, *The Tradition of Household Spirits* (Inner Traditions, 2013), p141.

17 Peterson-Bidoshi, p341.

18 Gowing cites some examples from the Tirana suburbs of Babrru, Paskuqan and Kamez; Peterson-Bidoshi from areas around Tirana.

19 A similar dynamic may operate in the application of soft toys to lorry grilles, also construed as a luck object – see Grilled Teddy Bears panel.

20 See for instance some of Ismail Kadare's novels, especially *Spring Flowers, Spring Frost*.

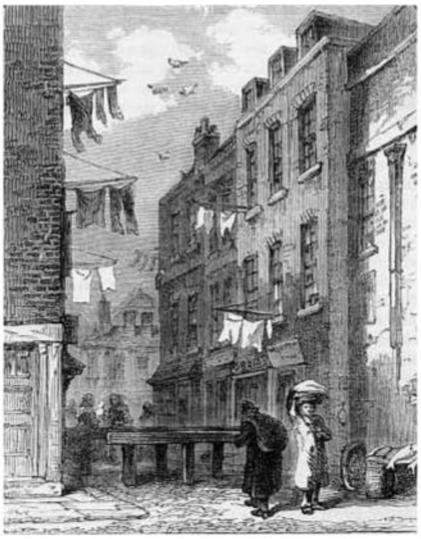
21 John M Roberts, "Belief in the Evil Eye in World Perspective", in C Maloney (ed.), *The Evil Eye*, Columbia University Press, 1976, pp223-278, p261.

THE TELL-TALE EYE

JAN BONDESON explores the history of one of the odder delusions of criminology: the notion that on the retinas of the recently murdered is captured an image of the last thing they saw – the perfect scientific evidence to catch a killer...

> **"It passed darkly. Shuttered, tenantless, unweeded gardens. Whole place gone to hell. Wrongfully condemned. Murder. The murderer's image in the eye of the murdered..."**
> **James Joyce, *Ulysses*.**

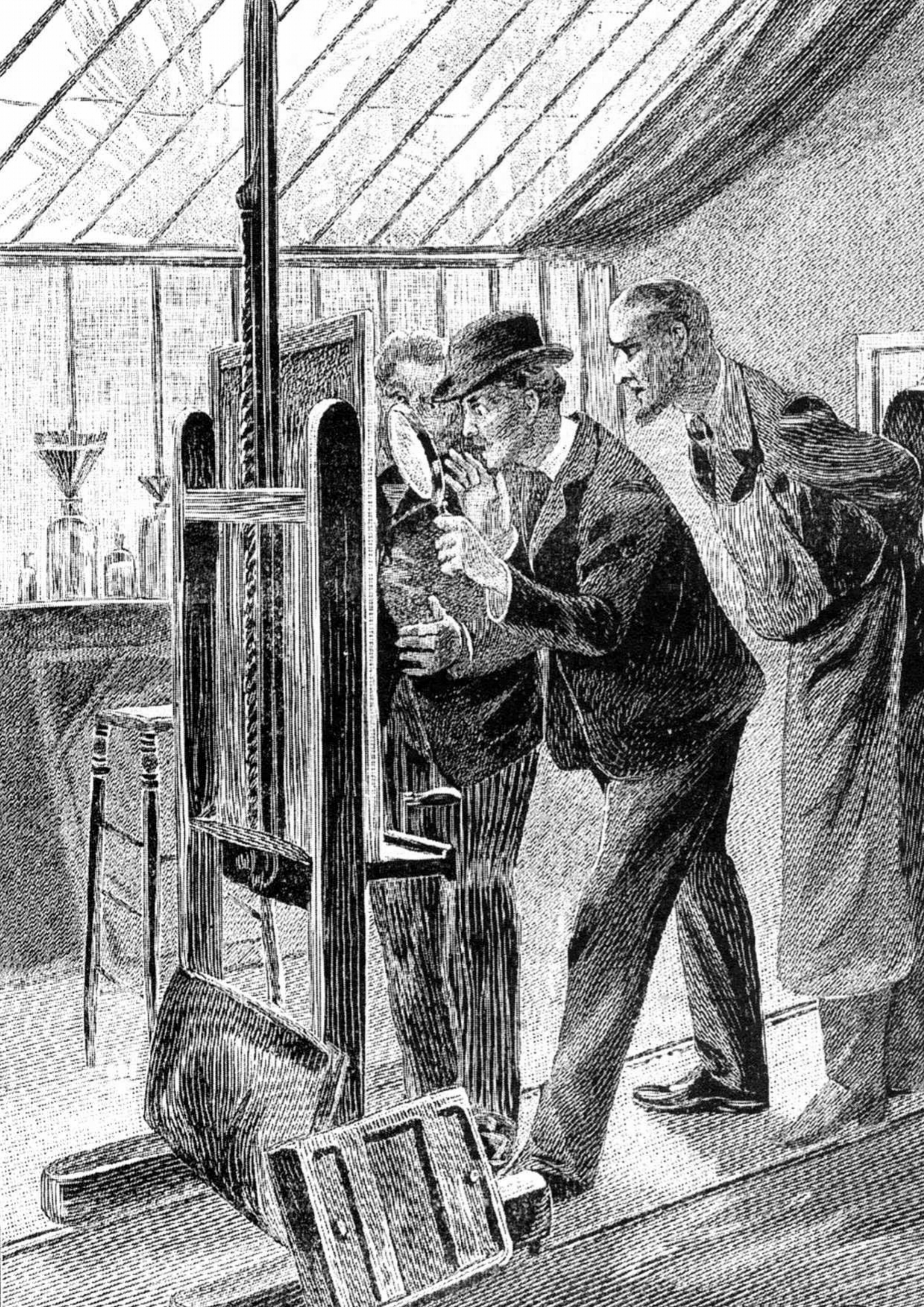
In 1863, the house at 4 George Street, St Giles, was a brothel owned by a certain David Hopkin George. His young servant Margaret Gurley was responsible for the daily running of this establishment, situated right in the middle of the St Giles rookery, one of London's most notorious vice blackspots. At 7am on 9 April 1863, Margaret Gurley was showing one of the brothel customers out. She noticed a man and a woman waiting outside, clearly wanting to share a bed on the premises. The woman was 28-year-old Emma Jackson, a streetwalking prostitute who had taken her customers to 4 George Street more than once before; the man was of middle height and wore dark clothes. Margaret invited them to the empty first floor front room, but as there were no sheets on the bed and Mr George was fast asleep, she gave them her own room at the first floor back instead. Since Margaret was very tired, having been kept up nearly all night by the customers of the busy brothel coming and going, she went to the kitchen and slept until 11.30. At 5pm, she asked Clara Mullinade, one of the young prostitutes who lodged on the second floor, to wake up the couple who were in Margaret's own room, but the terrified Clara soon returned, screaming: "There's a woman dead in the room!"

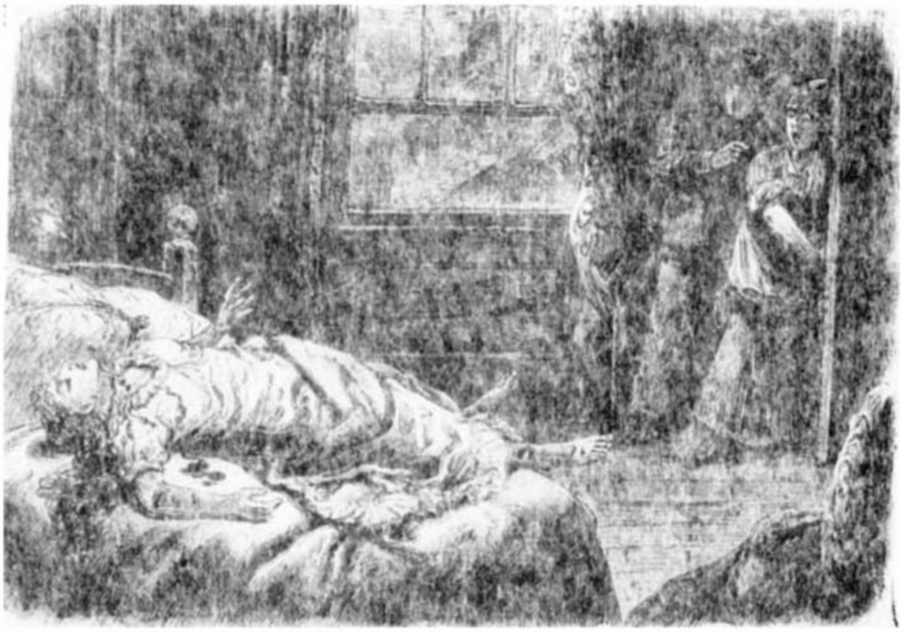


LEFT: A view of the Rookery, St Giles, 1860. From Walter Thornbury's *Old and New London*. **FACING PAGE:** The eyeball photographs are examined in Jules Verne's novel *The Kip Brothers* (see panel, p40).

POLICE INFORMANTS WERE NOT POPULAR IN THE SHADY HALF-WORLD OF OF THE ST GILES ROOKERY

When Margaret Gurley came running up to her bedroom, the murdered woman was a horrible sight: Emma Jackson's throat had been cut from ear to ear, and the bed was saturated with blood. There were two other deep stab wounds in the back of the neck, and the walls and ceiling of the murder room were liberally sprinkled with blood. A police constable and a doctor were swiftly called in, and it was found that Emma Jackson's windpipe and carotid arteries had been severed in the frenzied attack. Detective Inspector Frederick Williamson, who had been put in charge of the case, and his force of Scotland Yard detectives, made sure to question all the inhabitants of No 4, but the lodgers and prostitutes had precious little to tell them. Police informants were not popular in the shady half-world of St Giles. It turned out that Emma Jackson had lived in a hovel behind Andrew Osborn's butcher's





ABOVE: The body of Emma Jackson is found, from *Illustrated Police News*, 24 November 1888.
BELOW: Another view of the St Giles Rookery.

"UPON THE RETINA WILL BE DEPICTED THE LAST THING THAT APPEARED BEFORE THEM"

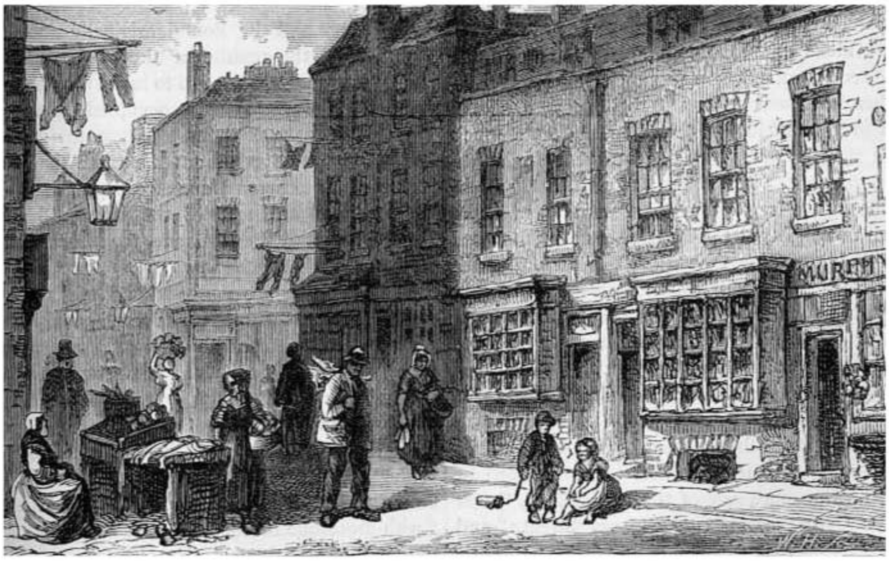
shop at 10 Berwick Street, Soho, together with her parents. Her father was an out-of-work clerk and her mother a shirt-maker. Emma had tried shirt-making for herself, but she often lapsed into drunkenness and prostitution.

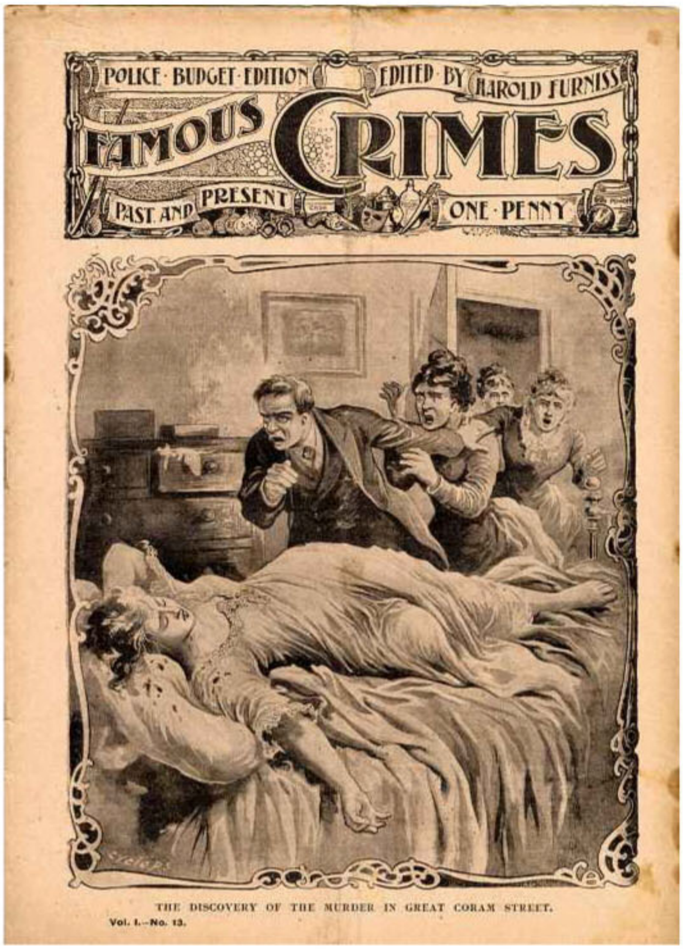
At 7.15 in the morning of the day of the murder, two young shoe-blacks named Daniel Murphy and William Stokes had been plying their trade at the corner of Dean Street and Old Compton Street when a man and a woman had come up to them to have their boots cleaned. The woman fitted the description of Emma Jackson, and the man was a dapper-looking chap wearing dark clothes. He did not look like a foreigner, and spoke English without an accent. Stokes had a good look at him: he had short whiskers and fair hair, and his eyes appeared weak and inflamed. The police were convinced that Stokes had seen the murderer, and along with Margaret Gurley, he became a star witness in the case. The newspapers had a field-day with idle speculation: had Emma Jackson known her killer well, and had he actually lived in the same neighbourhood? People gathered in George Street to stand gawping at the murder house, and rumours flew that the police detectives had gained some vital clue, or that the murderer was already in custody.

THE LAST THING YOU SEE

Soon after the murder of Emma Jackson, on 15 April, the Herefordshire photographer William H Warner, active at the Literary Institute in Ross-on-Wye, wrote to Detective Sergeant James Thomson, one of the Scotland Yard detectives investigating the St Giles's Murder. He pointed out that: "If the eyes of a murdered person be photographed within certain time of death, upon the retina will be found depicted the last thing that appeared before them, and that in the present case the features of the murderer would most probably be found thereon." Warner had himself taken a photograph of the eye of a calf a few hours after death, and upon microscopic examination he found depicted on it the lines of the pavement of the slaughterhouse floor. Although deluged by various cranky letters from the general public, Sergeant Thomson sent the photographer a polite reply. He had himself taken an interest in photographing the eyes of murder victims, which he believed a subject of great importance. About four years earlier, he had spoken with an eminent oculist on the subject, and been informed that unless the eyes were photographed within 24 hours of death, no result would be obtained, since the image in the eye gradually disappeared. He had not seen the body of Emma Jackson until 40 hours after death, the eyes had been closed, and the post-mortem examination had already taken place; the eyes had not been photographed. Warner published the correspondence in a professional journal, from which it was excerpted in several newspapers under the headline 'Photography and Murder'. Having a sceptical attitude to these new-fangled ideas, the *Lancet* objected to such quackery appearing in the press. The matter was a mere hoax, and "before attempting the photographic feat which is suggested, Mr Thomson might find useful practice in endeavouring to subtract the sound of a flute from a ton of coal, or to draw out the moonshine from cucumber seeds."

The coroner's inquest on Emma Jackson was opened on 11 April at Tursham's Oporto Stores in Broad Street, before Dr Edwin Lankester and a respectable jury. The inquest-room was crowded to capacity, and hundreds of people were standing outside. The jury went to see the remains of poor Emma Jackson, which had been allowed to remain in the bed in the murder room. Not unexpectedly, the mangled body and the blood-spattered room was a shocking sight to the jurymen, but they were still alert enough to notice that the wall between the murder room and the first floor front room was of slender plaster construction, with a door in the middle. It was rightly considered remarkable that the murderer had been able to dispatch his victim without alerting the two women sharing the adjoining room. John Jackson, the first witness and the brother of the deceased, formally identified the body. He worked as a pot-man at the Fox in Wardour Street, and was well aware of his sister's vicious life, having seen her with 'clients' more than once. Margaret Gurley, described as a respectable-looking girl of about 18, next gave evidence. She admitted that the brothel where she worked, at 4 George Street, took in people at all hours of the night without asking questions about their character. She could remember admitting Emma Jackson and her 'gentleman friend' at 7am the day of the murder. Having been very tired at the time, she could only recall that he had been of middle height and neatly dressed in dark clothes. Mr John Weekes, surgeon, described




POLICE · BUDGET · EDITION
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FAMOUS CRIMES
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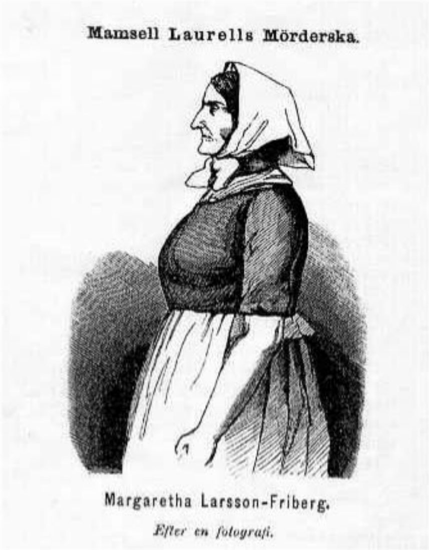
THE DISCOVERY OF THE MURDER IN GREAT CORAM STREET.
Vol. I.—No. 13.


Mamsell Laurells Mörderska.
Margaretha Larsson-Friberg.
Efter en fotografi.

LEFT: The murder of Harriet Buswell is discovered. **BELOW:** Margaretha Larsdotter, the imprudent Stockholm murderess.

the injuries to the deceased. He presumed that her throat had first been cut, and that she had then been stabbed in the neck four times, presumably with the same weapon.

The St Giles's Murder was widely reported in newspapers all over the country, and the police were deluged with tips. The *Daily Telegraph* compared it with the well-known 1838 unsolved murder of Eliza Grimwood in Waterloo Road, predicting that in spite of the diligence of the police the end result would be the same. Another newspaper article made the preposterous suggestion that since a thimble had been found in the bed of Emma Jackson, the killer might be a woman; it compared the murder to the fantasies of Edgar Allan Poe, likening the seedy neighbourhood of George Street to the fictitious Rue Morgue in Paris, although refraining from raising the spectre of a razor-wielding orang-utan climbing up the drainpipes to reach the room of Emma Jackson, with bloody murder on its simian mind. The police file on the case contains many anonymous letters, some from people pointing the finger at old enemies or people behaving suspiciously, others showing an interest in the government reward of £100 for the apprehension and conviction of the murderer. The file is filled with documentation, describing the often obscure and convoluted leads followed up by the detectives, often with anticlimactic outcomes. A number of drunks and workhouse inmates gave themselves up for the murder, but were not believed.

In early March 1864, the police received a detailed letter pointing the finger at a certain WH Whitton, who was connected with a travelling circus. At the time of the murder, he had worked as a comedian at the Queen's Theatre, Tottenham Street, but he had lost his job a few months later due to his drunken habits. This tip was initially taken quite seriously, but Whitton did not match the description of the murderer, and the witness Stokes confidently ruled him out after seeing his photograph. In early May 1867, several newspapers reported that the mysterious murder of Emma Jackson had belatedly been solved: "Recently a man of respectable appearance was discovered dead in a quiet neighbourhood in the city of New York, and on the matter being investigated by the authorities there was little doubt left in their minds, that he had terminated his life by his own hands. On his person there was found a letter, written to a friend, stating that he was the man who on 8 April, 1863 beguiled the young woman Jackson to a house in George Street, St Giles's, and there assassinated her, and since that time he had travelled from place to place, but being unable to find any rest he had determined upon committing suicide, and that he had put an end to his unhappy existence." The newspaper article, which spread from the London papers to the provincial ones, does not provide the name of this transatlantic suicide, but a letter from Michigan to the Scotland Yard detectives, dated 4 May 1867, claimed that he was none other than the former comedian WH. Whitton, who had previously been accused of committing the murder. But in spite of this interesting transatlantic clue, the murder of Emma Jackson was never solved.

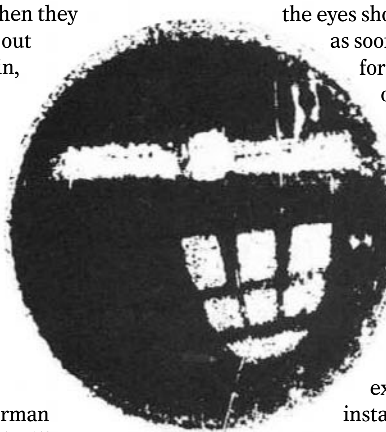
RETINAL EVIDENCE

Not the least curious thing about the murder of Emma Jackson is that it is the earliest British murder case where the notion that photography of the eyes of the murder victim might prove valuable, since the image of the murderer might be found therein, was seriously discussed. This curious ophtalmological notion appears to date back to the late 1850s, when some transatlantic newspapers raised it: a certain Dr Pollock of Chicago specialised in eye photography, and Dr Sandford of Auburn had taken an interest in the eyes of JH Beardsley, who had been murdered by a person unknown, albeit without any productive result. These experiments were debated after the murder of young Saville Kent at Road Hill House in 1860: a correspondent to the *Bristol Daily Post* urged that since the human eye worked just like a daguerreotype plate, Saville's eyes should be photographed without delay; but a writer in the *Bath Chronicle* pointed out that the boy had been asleep when he was murdered, so there could be no incriminating evidence on his retinas. In 1865, Saville's sister Constance Kent confessed to the murder.

In 1864, there were newspaper reports that when a murder had been committed in the old town of St Petersburg, Russia, it was decided to photograph the eyes of the dead man. There was amazement when the figures of two soldiers, on whose breasts were the insignia of St George, were clearly seen. By some unspecified stratagem, the two murderers were identified and brought to justice. There are unreferenced anecdotes, from the popular press, of the successful use of eye photography in a celebrated Italian murder case in 1864. In September 1867, there was sensation in Stockholm when a well-to-do old lady, Maria Lovisa Laurell, was found murdered in her house at 12 Brunnsgatan. Her neighbour Margaretha Larsdotter, a brawny and sinister-looking woman, was arrested and tried for the crime. One of the witnesses testified that she had once told the murderess about an article in the *Aftonbladet* newspaper, which had stated that the eyes of Maria Lovisa Laurell were to be photographed in the hope of detecting the image of her murderer. The imprudent Larsdotter then burst out with the Swedish equivalent of "Blimey, then they'll arrest me!" She was eventually found guilty of murder and sentenced to imprisonment for life.

On Christmas Eve 1872, the young prostitute Harriet Buswell was murdered at her lodgings at 12 Great Coram Street, Bloomsbury. Several witnesses had seen her with an unshaven, foreign-looking man the evening of the murder, and it is likely that he picked her up at the Alhambra

Theatre in Leicester Square. An individual of a similar description had been observed skulking away from the murder house early on Christmas Day. After a reward of £200 had been posted for the detection of the Great Coram Street murderer, the police received a torrent of information. Mischievous people informed against old enemies, and other jokers offered some friendly advice to the detectives. 'One who abhors crime' suggested that Buswell's body should be exhumed and her eyes photographed to reveal an image of her killer, but this suggestion was not taken seriously. Since several witnesses had thought the man seen with Harriet Buswell was German-looking, the police took an interest in a certain Carl Wohllebe, surgeon's mate on the German emigrant ship *Wangerland*, which was becalmed at Ramsgate. They knew that Wohllebe had made a Christmas excursion to London, and arranged a police line-up for some of the London witnesses. There was consternation when they instead confidently picked out the ship's Lutheran chaplain, Dr Gottfried Hessel. The chaplain was arrested and brought before the Bow Street magistrates, but many witnesses did not recognise him, and he had a moderately solid alibi for the evening of the murder. Hessel was released, and the Great Coram Street murder remains unsolved.



In 1876 and 1877, the German physiologists Franz Boll and Willy Kühne reported the discovery of rhodopsin, and the latter created 'optograms' from the retinas of freshly killed rabbits. In one of these optograms, he could see the meshwork of a window, to which the eye had been exposed just before death. The Manchester scientist Arthur Gamgee duplicated these experiments, quoting the original German sources, and highlighted their considerable importance. There was immediate interest not just from the medical and scientific world, but also from the photographic popular press, and analogies were made between the eye and retina and the camera and emulsion. Although Boll and Kühne had emphasised that the creation of an optogram demanded a freshly killed animal under laboratory conditions, there was enthusiasm among believers that the 'tell-tale eye' that would bring murderers to justice.

In January 1880, the servant girl Sarah Jane Roberts was murdered in Harpurhey, Manchester. The case was a mysterious one, with few clues available, and the newspapers recorded that when the girl was buried more than three days after the murder, the coffin was opened and the eyes photographed from a short distance. Superintendent Bent ordered magnifications of these photographs to be made, and they were closely examined in the hope of seeing the face of the murderer appear. Interviewed in the *Manchester Times*, Dr A Emrys-Jones, honorary surgeon to the Royal Eye Hospital, did not believe that the stratagem of photographing the eyes of a person who had been dead for three days would be productive of results; instead, the eyes should have been removed as soon as possible after death, for examination by a team of eye specialists. And indeed, Superintendent Bent's examination of the eye photographs turned out to be entirely futile, although the persistent policeman told a journalist that he intended to submit the negatives to a man of science for further examination. Thus the earliest instance of eyeball photography in a UK murder case ended anticlimactically.

In July 1880, after the death of his wife, the German Erhard Gustav Reif drowned his two youngest children in the Rhine. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to the guillotine. Willy Kühne applied to the authorities to be permitted to conduct an experiment on the corpse, and 10 minutes after Reif had been executed, his left eye was extracted and dissected. When the retina was prepared to construct the earliest known human optogram, nothing out of the ordinary was observed in the dead man's eye: no executioner and no guillotine, and no

ABOVE: German physiologists Willy Kühne (left) and Franz Boll. **TOP:** The rabbit optogram showing a barred window.

THE TELL-TALE EYE IN LITERATURE

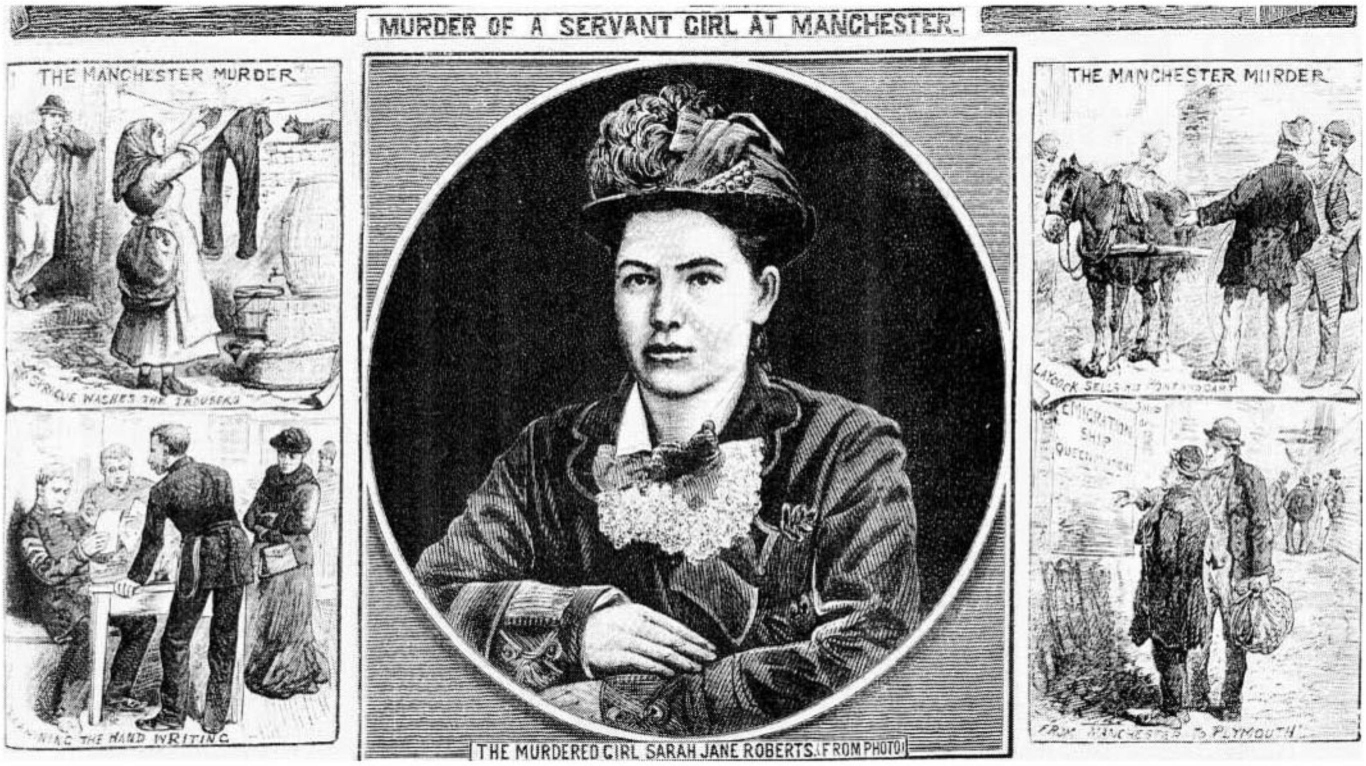
In Rudyard Kipling's 1891 short story 'The Room at the End of the Passage' an Englishman named Hummil dies of fright during the hot season in India, after having been tormented by insomnia and nightmares. Dr Spurstow, who has been dosing him with opium, photographs his eyes after death, but the images show such frightful horrors that he destroys them, and refuses to tell anyone what they showed.

In 1902, Jules Verne published *The Kip Brothers*, in which a ship's captain is stabbed to death in the colonies. The brothers Karl and Pieter Kip are arrested on circumstantial evidence, but photos of the eyes of the victim show that two sailors are the real culprits. They are brought to justice, and the brothers vindicated. Verne states that since the last image seen by some person is perpetually imprinted on the retina after death, eyeball photography is a valuable resource for modern forensic science.

In 1905, Thomas Dixon Jr published *The Clansman*, a racist novel set during the post-Civil War period. A white woman and her daughter die after falling down a steep precipice. The jury returns a verdict of accidental death, but Dr Cameron remains unconvinced. With a microscope, he examines the eyes of one of the victims, and finds "The bestial figure of a negro – his huge black hand plainly defined – the upper part of his face is dim, as if obscured by a grey mist of dawn – but the massive jaws and lips are clear – merciful God! – it's Gus!" The Ku Klux Klan, of which Dr Cameron himself is a leading member, are the 'good guys' in this extraordinary novel: they arrest the murderer Gus, who is bound and gagged, beaten, judged in front of a flaming cross, and summarily executed by the Clansmen.

In 1917, Swedish novelist Gunnar Serner, who wrote under the name Frank Heller, published the story 'The White Rat'. An alcoholic former medical student is incarcerated in a mental hospital. In his youth, he had been an enthusiastic vivisectionist, performing many cruel experiments on rats. When he dies from fright in the asylum, a doctor photographs his eyes, finding the image of a large white rat.

Although the concept of the tell-tale eye is moribund in forensic science, it remains alive and well in popular culture. The concept is quoted in a variety of novels, from Peter Ackroyd's *Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem* to science-fiction 'pulps'; in a variety of horror films, the eyes of the dead give up their secret to thrilling effect; *Robocop* and *Doctor Who* have both dabbled in optogram interpretation, and the idea makes an appearance in the popular *X-Files* and *Fringe* cult TV series.


MURDER OF A SERVANT GIRL AT MANCHESTER.
THE MANCHESTER MURDER
WASHES THE TROUSERS
THE HAND WRITING
THE MURDERED GIRL SARAH JANE ROBERTS. (FROM PHOTO)
THE MANCHESTER MURDER
EMIGRATION SHIP
FROM MANCHESTER TO PLYMOUTH

ABOVE: A portrait of murder victim Sarah Jane Roberts, from the *Illustrated Police News*, 7 February 1880.

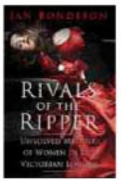
phantasms of the last thoughts and visions of a severed head; but then, Reif had been blindfolded on the scaffold.

As for Ripperine connections to the tell-tale eye, the police surgeon Dr GB Phillips was once asked if he believed any benefit would come from photographing the eyes of Annie Chapman, one of Jack the Ripper's canonical victims; he emphatically pointed out that he did not think so. According to none other than Detective Chief Inspector Walter Dew, several photographs of fellow victim Mary Kelly's wide-open, staring eyes had been taken by expert photographers with the latest cameras. In his memoirs, Dew writes that although the detectives did not believe in the widespread superstition that the retina of a murdered person's eyes would, if photographed, give a picture of the last person upon whom the victim looked, it was decided to try the experiment, the result of which was negative. According to Hargrave Adam, the Black Museum had a photographic positive of the face of a murder victim with the eyes wide open, which was exhibited to prove that the idea of the 'tell-tale eye' was erroneous. According to *Amateur Photographer* magazine, the wide-open, staring eyes of the victim were photographed in a celebrated Great Yarmouth murder in 1900: this must have been the murder of Mary Jane Bennett, for which her husband Herbert John was tried, convicted and hanged. Neither of the two books on this case, nor the contemporary newspaper press, mentions eyeball photography being performed, however.

THE EYES DON'T HAVE IT

The enthusiasm for the tell-tale eye theory was at its greatest during the years 1860-1890, particularly in the United States, but the idea kept making an appearance when least expected, all over the globe. In 1920, the card-playing New York businessman Joseph Boyne Elwell, known as the 'Wizard of Whist', was shot dead in his house at 244 West 70th Street, Manhattan. The police were baffled by this mysterious murder, and the perpetrator was never brought to justice. An elderly medic, Dr Roland Cook, criticised the Chief Medical Examiner of New York City, Dr Charles Norris, for failing to make sure that Elwell's eyeballs were photographed immediately after the murder was detected. Cook argued that as Elwell had been shot by a person standing right in front of him, it would have been easy to obtain a picture of the murderer. Just possibly, it might not be too late to redeem Norris's incompetence: the body must be exhumed at dead of night, for the retinas not to be wiped clean of incriminating evidence by the cold light of day, and eyeball photography performed; the Chief Medical Examiner's office pooh-poohed Dr Cook's recommendations. The idea lived on for longer in continental Europe than it did in Britain, although many reports of its use appear to be newspaper canards, like the report that a perfect image of the axe-wielding German murderer Fritz Angerstein was found on the photograph of the retina of one of his victims. The publicity given to the use of the 'tell-tale eye' has more than once inspired murderers to mutilate the eyes of their victims, most notably the two ruffians Browne and Kennedy who shot out Police Constable Gutteridge's eyes after murdering him in 1927.

But in real life, the concept of the 'tell-tale eye' is not of much use in criminology. Firstly, the last sight seen by a murder victim is unlikely to be the killer. In the case of Emma Jackson, with which we began, it would more likely have been some crumpled, bloodstained bed linen. Even if we presume that the sadistic murderer held poor Emma by the ears and grinned into her face as she bled to death, the practical exploitation of his 'portrait' imprinted on her retinal optograms would be difficult indeed. She had been dead for more than seven hours when found, long enough for initial putrefaction to set in; even if she had been found earlier, the primitive photographical techniques of the time would only have captured artefacts. In my opinion, the historical instances of eyeball photography meeting with productive results must be fallacious and the result of wishful thinking in the interpretation of the photographs. And unlike in the case of frogs and rabbits, the fovea, the area of focused seeing in the human eye, is small in comparison to the entire retina. For the 'tell-tale eye' to be at all useful, it would require a team of ophthalmic surgeons to burst into the murder room very soon after the murder and remove and dissect the eyes and prepare the retinas of the victim in laboratory conditions, hoping to cause a sensation by catching the image of the killer and proving this obscure medical chimæra true after a century and a half. FT



This is an edited extract from Jan Bondeson's book *The Rivals of the Ripper* (History Press, 2016). There have been two recent books on the tell-tale eye: D Ogbourne, *Encyclopedia of Optography* (2008) and B Stiegler, *Belichtete Augen* (2011).

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

JAN BONDESON is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, a regular contributor to *FT* and the author of numerous books, including *Queen Victoria's Stalker* (2010), and *Murder Houses of London* (2014).

IN THE LAND OF THE CHANEQUES

When **CHRIS POLLARD** first moved to Veracruz State he was a confirmed sceptic. Since then, odd experiences and tales of close encounters with Mexico's little people have left him wondering whether the stone-throwing, trick-playing, child-stealing fairy-folk might be more real than he'd ever imagined...
Main illustration by **YOHAN SACRÉ**

CHRIS POLLARD

ABOVE: A typical street scene in Coatepec, Veracruz State.

COLECTIVO LUNAS DE VERACRUZ

Mexican folklore is famous for many things: colourful celebrations like the Day of the Dead, pre-Hispanic cities, the cult of 'la Santísima Muerte' (Our Lady Death), the crying ghost 'la Llorona', and more recently the goat-sucking 'chupacabras'. Less well known, but ever-present in many rural communities, are the Little People: the 'alux' of the Maya or the 'chaneque' of Veracruz State. *Chaneques* have even been reported from Xalapa, the busy state capital, but as the city expands, and the population, traffic and noise increase, this is becoming less common. Nevertheless, in nearby Coatepec and many smaller towns and villages throughout the region, few locals doubt the existence of such beings, and many will talk freely about their experiences with them.

I have always considered myself to be open-minded with regard to anything mysterious or unexplained, so I was surprised to confront my own incredulity when I first came to the area at the beginning of our hi-tech 21st century and heard stories about the *chaneques* told in all earnestness by serious witnesses. There was no hint of ambiguity or alternative interpretation in these accounts, and it felt strange to hear people talk so matter-of-factly about how the *chaneques* had played tricks on them.

FEW LOCALS DOUBT THE EXISTENCE OF SUCH BEINGS AND MANY WILL TALK FREELY ABOUT THEM

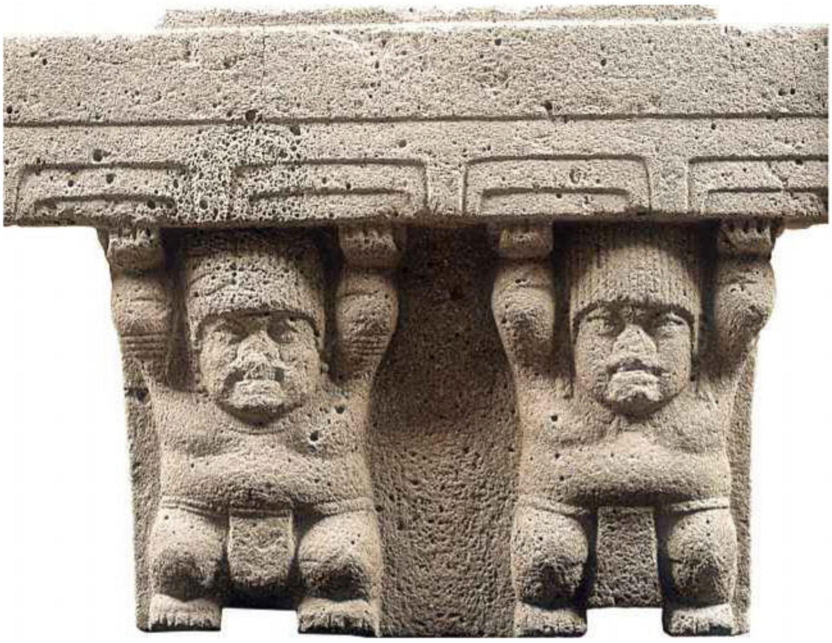
In fact, except for those who have moved here recently from large cities in other states, everybody seems to have a tale to tell about the *chaneques*; and if they haven't had some experience with them personally, then their mother, uncle, friend, or some other trusted personal acquaintance has.

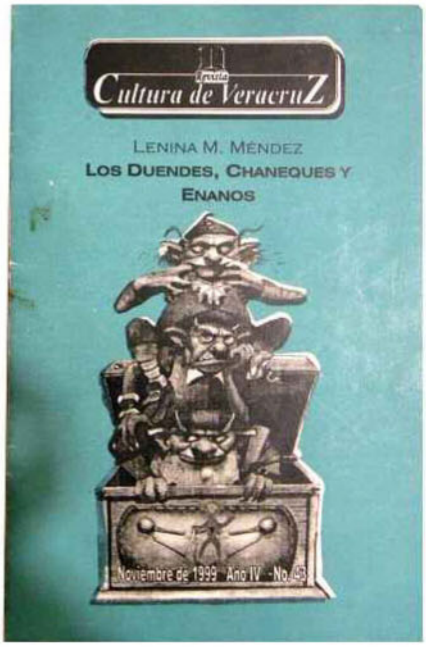
LITTLE PRANKSTERS

The *chaneques* have a very long history in Mexico, dating back at least to the Olmec period about 2,000 years ago. The name comes from the Nahuatl language spoken by the Aztecs and Toltecs, which is still the mother tongue of around two and a half million Mexicans. 'Chaneque' literally means 'dweller' or 'inhabitant' but here refers to those beings the Aztecs called 'ohuican chaneque', meaning 'those who dwell in dangerous places', a reference to the solitary locations in craggy mountains or dense forests where they were originally a kind of guardian spirit. In pre-Hispanic times they seem to have been minor deities that protected woods and springs. Alternatively, a local Christianised explanation of their origin claims that they are the spirits of unbaptised children who were unable to enter paradise and remain in limbo.

Whatever their origin, those who have seen them usually describe them as looking like small children, but with the lined and wrinkled faces of the elderly. This was exactly the description given by a former student of mine, Ana, who told me about the time she encountered them when she was a little girl.

One day, Ana and her friends were playing on their bicycles, riding round the old stone tracks through the coffee plantations that flourish beneath the ancient cloud-forest canopy in this region. Despite playing in the same area where they always went out on their bikes, they managed to lose their way – getting lost in familiar territory is one of the most common signs of *chaneque* activity (similar to being 'pixy-led' in British fairy traditions; see **FT323:25, 333:25**). They were trying to find their way home when they came across some small figures sitting in the branches of a tree up above them. These were about the size of toddlers, but with the furrowed features of extreme old age. Ana and her friends asked them where they lived, and they pointed to a ramshackle little stone house nearby. Then the children asked them how to get back from this place – at which the *chaneques* just began to laugh with an evil cackle.





Revista
Cultura de VeracruZ

LENINA M. MÉNDEZ
LOS DUENDES, CHANEQUES Y
ENANOS

Noviembre de 1999 Año IV -No. 43

TOP: Carved Olmec figures thought to represent *chaneques*. **LEFT:** A book about chaneques by a local researcher. **BELOW:** El Puente del Diablo, where in 2006 a *chaneque* was allegedly captured by some hunters and put in a cage.

CHRIS POLLARD

Frightened by this, Ana and her friends got back on their bikes and cycled away as fast as they could, and fortunately they soon found their way home again. Although they had got lost, the whole experience had not really seemed to take very long. Nevertheless, when they got home their relieved parents told them they had been looking for them for hours, and it was indeed far later in the day than when they had gone out to play. This kind of time distortion is another common element in encounters with the Little People here, just as it is in other parts of the world.

Another student told me about an uncle who got lost on his own ranch. One evening, in his youth, he had gone to visit his girlfriend who lived on a neighbouring ranch, but on returning home he became hopelessly lost. This was despite the fact that he was on the very property where he had grown up and lived his whole life, every corner of which he knew in perfect detail. The obvious explanation for this in local lore was that it was the doing of the *chaneques*.

Moving or hiding things is another favourite trick of the little people the world over, and our local *chaneques* are no exception. Tales abound of small household objects going missing, and appearing in the sugar jar, at the bottom of a drawer in another room, or in other unexpected places. Doña Leticia, who runs a small vegetarian restaurant on the edge of town, told me how they like to hide her firewood. When collecting sticks and branches in the forest she gathers them into a big pile and then goes off for some more, coming back several times to deposit them all in the same place. Sometimes, when she returns to the spot where she put the sticks, they will be gone –

the *chaneques* are playing their pranks again. After searching diligently for her fuel, Doña Leticia will eventually find it back in the very place from which it had disappeared.

One trait that *chaneques* share with some of their fairy cousins on the Iberian Peninsula is the habit of throwing stones at passers-by; another former student related a dramatic illustration of this to me. She was the outdoors type, and was once hiking with a friend in the middle of the mountain forest, miles away from any sign of civilisation. When it was time to take a break and cook some lunch, they got out a little camping stove and put a pan of water on to make some soup. All of a sudden, a stone fell from the sky, landing quite near them – then another, and another. Somebody seemed to be throwing them deliberately – and one even landed right inside their cooking pot – yet they were miles away from any human habitation, and had seen no sign of anyone else anywhere nearby. Once again, the *chaneques* took the blame.

CHANEQUES AND CHILDREN

Another characteristic they have in common with the Little People of other countries is their affinity with children. It is said that small children can see them much more easily than adults can; their presence is often indicated by childlike laughter, and when they are encountered they are often seen playing or dancing like small children. They have also been known to 'take' little children, although unlike some European fairy folk they do not replace them with a changeling, and usually return them. Sometimes they invite them to play, and on other occasions they just move them from one place to another. This actually happened to one of my wife's cousins.

My mother-in-law is a level-headed, hard-working person not given to flights of fancy, yet her testimony on this matter seems unbelievable. One day, my wife's aunt was visiting with her baby daughter. As the baby was asleep, they popped her down on a bed in a room right next to the kitchen while they were preparing lunch. When they went back to the room a little later, the baby was nowhere to be seen. So they began to search the house, and eventually, after searching high and low, they discovered the little girl, in the very same room where they had left her, lying fast asleep *under* the bed she had been put down on. It hardly seems possible that the baby could have fallen off the bed and rolled underneath it without crying loudly enough to be heard in an adjacent room, so it was understood that the prank-loving *chaneques* had gently moved her while she slept.

A more dramatic example came from another former student, David. It happened in the mid-1990s, when his family were living on the outskirts of Coatepec in a house with a beautiful garden. One morning, a friend of his mother's popped in to visit with her young daughter, Maria. They sat together in the front room, chatting over coffee and eating cake.

COLECTIVO LUNAS DE VERACRUZ

IT IS SAID THAT SMALL CHILDREN CAN SEE CHANEQUES MUCH MORE EASILY THAN ADULTS CAN

After a while Maria's mother went to the bathroom at the back of the house and her daughter followed, but when she returned the little girl did not.

"Where's your daughter?" asked David's mother.

"I thought she was here," replied her friend.

"No, she went with you."

They began calling the girl; there was no reply, and they started to search the house. Maria was nowhere to be found, so they continued looking in the back garden, calling the girl's name all the while, but to no avail. Next they went and knocked on the neighbours' doors, and looked in their gardens too, but still there was no sign of Maria. By now, the girl's mother was very distraught. "OK," said David's mother, "Let's call the police." This they did, and the police informed the local radio station, which announced that a little girl had gone missing, gave her description, and asked anyone who spotted her to call the police.

Hours passed, and the mother was frantic with worry. Late in the afternoon, the police received a phone call from somebody on the other side of town. They had seen a girl matching the description given on the radio. The police came, and sure enough it was Maria who, fortunately, looked fine. They brought her back to her mother, who sobbed with relief. Of course, she asked the girl where she had been, and what she had been doing all this time. "Well," said Maria, "I followed you when you went to the bathroom, and then I went out into the garden. When I was there, a little man appeared and asked me if I wanted to play with him. So we've been playing!"

And that was all the explanation there ever was of the girl's strange disappearance, protracted absence and reappearance on the other side of town.

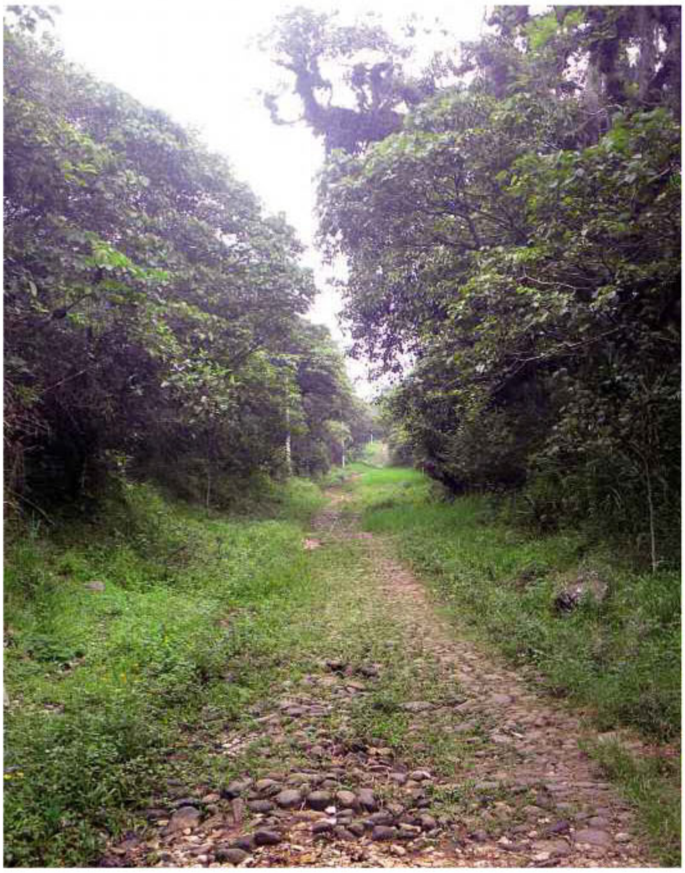
Perhaps the little girl's mother forgot to follow local tradition and put her daughter's clothes on inside out. Many parents of small children still put at least their undergarments on inside out to protect them from the *chaneques*. Other supposed means of defence include swearing and flatulence!

CHRIS POLLARD

ABOVE: Los Carriles, Coatepec,the street where Maria, the missing little girl, was eventually found. Had she been temporarily abducted by *chaneques*? **TOP:** A rag doll *chaneque*, made by local women's handicraft collective 'Lunas de Veracruz' based in Coatepec.

GHOSTLY CHANEQUES

Here, it is common for hauntings to be attributed to *chaneques* rather than ghosts, especially if the voices and laughter of children at play are heard. In one case included by local researcher Lenina Mendez in her book *Los Duendes, Chaneques y Enanos*, a family abandoned their house due to the *chaneques* that lived in the garden. One evening the family had gone out to a dance, leaving their 12-year-old daughter alone with the maid in the old colonial house in the town centre where they lived. As the girl was trying to get to sleep, she heard child-like voices and laughter coming from the garden. She went to look out the window, and in the garden was a group of tiny figures with ancient faces all dressed in green, playing children's games. When she woke the maid and returned, they had all disappeared, and although they were never seen again, their voices were frequently heard. The family left the house soon afterwards, and all those who have lived there since have heard an eerie chorus of child-like laughter on brightly moonlit nights.



CHRIS POLLARD

LEFT: The track where the author had a close encounter with a mysterious moving car tyre.

Belief in *chaneques* is so strong here that when it was rumoured some years ago, in 2006, that one had been captured and was being kept in a little cage on a nearby ranch, there was much discussion about whether or not this was possible. The story was picked up by the local press, who reported that two local men had set a hunting trap near El Puente del Diablo (the Devil's Bridge), and were surprised when they returned the next morning to find that it contained not the armadillo they were hoping to catch, but a humanoid figure about a foot tall with the face of an old man and long fingernails. When they opened the trap to let him out, the reports claimed, instead of fleeing he clung to one of the hunter's legs and they had no choice but to take him home with them. Confined to a cage, the *chaneque* ate only fruit and raw vegetables. He was said to have a frightening appearance and would growl at people he didn't like. It was also reported that the huntsman's family grew ill after he took the *chaneque* home.

PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

By now you may be wondering if I have ever encountered a *chaneque* myself. Well, I haven't seen one, but I may have been the victim of a couple of their pranks.

One night I was staying at the house of some friends in the countryside not far from our town. In an out-building, they have a workshop where they make drums. Wooden stairs lead to a wooden upper floor, where the finished drums are stored, and I was sleeping there. I laid out my mat and sleeping bag, turned out the lights, and got in. My friend had already gone to bed inside the house and everything was silent. After lying in the dark for about 15 minutes or so, trying to sleep, I suddenly heard a loud noise: "Poom!" It was the sound of somebody hitting one of the drums, hard. I froze and held my breath, listening carefully to see what would follow. Next I heard a soft creaking sound, as if a very small person were treading on the wooden steps… and then another. And that was all.

I lay quite still, listening intently and trying to think of an explanation. When an adult climbs the stairs, even if barefoot and treading very gently, it would be impossible for their weight not to cause every board to creak quite loudly on the way up, and again on the way back down. So what could it have been? A rat perhaps, falling off a shelf, and landing on one of the drums before scampering away? I hadn't heard any sounds that resembled scampering though, just two very soft creaks. Maybe the cord holding the skin tight on one of the drums had snapped, causing the sound – but then what about the creaks?

The next morning I examined the drums that were on the floor at the other end of the area where I'd been sleeping. Firstly I noticed that there were no shelves above them, or anything overhanging from which a rat or anything else could have fallen onto them. None of them had a loose cord; all were pulled tight, just as they were supposed to be.

Over breakfast I told my friend what had happened. "Oh," he said, "That must be the *chaneques*. Another friend who slept there saw one once. And my neighbours' children sometimes play with them. They usually see them in the trees up on the hill over there." So that was that. There never was any 'logical' explanation for what I heard. Only the *chaneques*…

On another occasion I was cycling home at twilight from a neighbouring village, making my way along an old stone track through the forest and coffee plantations. In one section the track goes up a long, but not very steep, slope. The light was fading rapidly, and as the air gradually congealed into darkness around me I noticed something up ahead, coming down the track towards me. It couldn't have been more than 2ft (60cm) tall, and as I cycled up the slope it came closer and closer on the other side of the track.

For some reason it gave me a very strange feeling – whether nervousness or the intuition of something supernatural, I don't know. I was still trying to make out what the small dark form was, when it suddenly veered towards me and crossed the track just in front of me, resolving itself into a car tyre that toppled to one side, circling to a halt right beside me as I cycled by. I still had a very odd feeling, but desperate for a rational explanation I thought that when I reached the top of the slope I would see whoever had rolled the tyre down the track. However, as I crested the hill moments later, looking from side to side and listening intently, there was neither sight nor sound of anybody in the vicinity. So, where had the tyre come from, and how did it roll down the track all by itself? Was it the *chaneques* playing tricks on me?

After these strange experiences, and all the stories I have heard, my initial scepticism lies in tatters. The number of perfectly serious people round here – farmworkers, lawyers, doctors and others – who tell you these stories so matter-of-factly, with no benefit to be gained from having invented them, is remarkable. Whether or not there really are little people playing tricks on us, something very weird certainly seems to be happening. **FT**

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

CHRIS POLLARD has been a purveyor of the English language on four continents. He currently lives with his wife and daughter in Veracruz State, where he has been based for the past 14 years.

HIDDEN MASTERS

In the 1930s, the greatest Masters from Europe and around the world came together in the UK to form a unique Order, which still exists today. It was built on exactly the same principles and teachings as the secret orders of the 18th Dynasty of Ancient Egypt, in which the same Masters of today had also been teachers and leaders – Teachings which themselves were very ancient even at that time, having been derived originally from the continent of Atlantis. Thus, in the 1930s, for the first time in 3500 years, these Teachings were made available to the worthy, in their **entirety**, and for almost a century since then, this Order has accepted students from all around the world and from all walks of life, whether they be royalty or world leaders or whether they be farmers or college students.

* * *

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* * *

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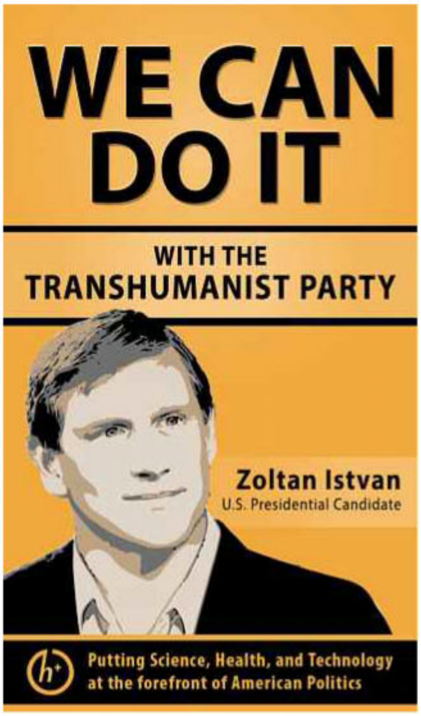
STRANGE STATESMEN #10

AMERICAN PSYCHOS 3 INDEPENDENTS' DAY

Ahead of the US election, **SD TUCKER** examines the strangest independent candidates from the nation's past; men who have bravely embodied the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of looniness.

If you want to run for President in America then, unlike in the UK, you don't always need to worry about getting the backing of Big Politics. In Britain, the PM is the leader of the Party that gets most seats in the Commons; in America, the President can easily be Republican when Congress is Democrat. Indeed, the President needn't *necessarily* be Republican or Democrat at all. Seeing as the Founding Fathers wanted a system full of checks and balances to guard against centralised tyranny, a President isn't obliged to have a governing majority of any kind. As a result, there are plenty of odd little organisations which have sprung up over the years, hoping to bypass the capture of Congress and propel a charismatic figure straight into the White House to shake up the Washington old-guard. One of 2016's most unlikely Presidential candidates, for instance, is Zoltan Istvan, of the tiny Transhumanist Party, who is currently travelling across America in a vehicle shaped like a giant coffin called 'The Immortality Bus', offering voters the gift of everlasting life through massive State investment in advanced super-technology – at least one trillion dollars over the next decade. Istvan is realistic about his prospects, though; he doesn't expect to come first in 2016. America's first immortal President will have to wait until 2020 or 2024 to take his Oath of Office, he says, but given that Zoltan will live forever, this is his own equivalent of about 10 minutes. However, despite the fact that he once planned to go out on the campaign-trail with "a handful of six-foot-tall robots", and has in the past speculated that "If I get shot while campaigning… I could really rise to prominence quickly", Istvan is by no means a nut, merely an incorrigible optimist.[1] Even if he lived long enough to see the heat-death of the Universe, however, it is virtually certain that Zoltan would never encounter men quite as odd as some of his predecessors on the presidential trail…

SUNK WITHOUT TRACE


WE CAN DO IT
WITH THE TRANSHUMANIST PARTY
Zoltan Istvan
U.S. Presidential Candidate
h+
Putting Science, Health, and Technology at the forefront of American Politics

LEFT: Zoltan Istvan, currently travelling across the USA in his 'Immortality Bus'.

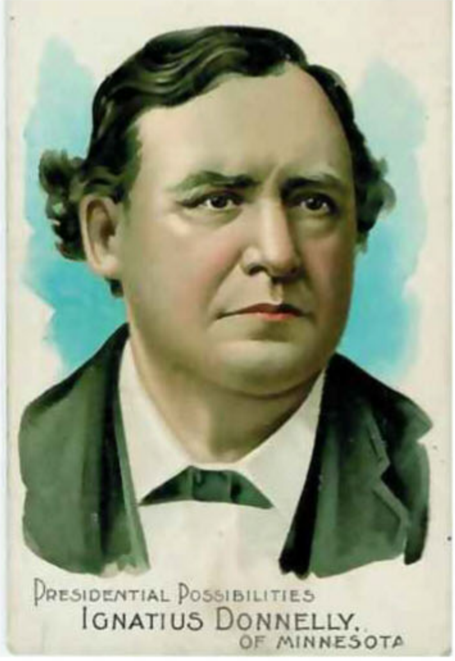
Probably the most significant minority-party candidate of the past was Congressman Ignatius Donnelly (1831-1900), a science fiction writer, agricultural reformer, anti-usury campaigner, utopian theoriser, conspiratologist and so-called 'Prince of the Cranks'. In 1900, the rabble-rousing Donnelly was selected as the Populist Party candidate for Vice-President, his ticket narrowly missing out to that of the Republicans' William McKinley by a measly 7,177,875 votes. The disappointment at missing out on high office by such a fine margin must have taken its toll on Ignatius, as he dropped dead within two months.

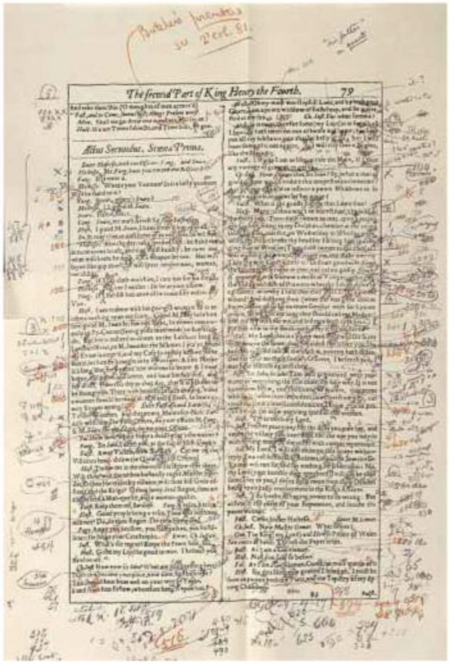
A qualified lawyer, Donnelly had first entered national life back in 1863, becoming a Republican Congressman for Minnesota, and had served as a State Senator from 1874-1878, but then fell out of office for a while and devoted himself to writing a veritable conveyor-belt of crank books. As well as being largely responsible for the modern resurgence of interest in Atlantis (see **FT332:48-50**), Donnelly also penned 1883's *Ragnarök: The Age of Fire and Gravel*, proposing that Earth had almost been hit by a giant comet during biblical times (leading to all kinds of disasters, including Atlantis's sinking and the extinction of the mammoth), as well as three books claiming that Shakespeare was really England's former Lord Chancellor, Francis Bacon. Visiting Britain in 1888 to promote his latest volume, Donnelly went to Bacon's home-town of St Albans in search of his ghost. There, he experimented with a compass, which, he said, always pointed towards the great man's monument no matter where in the local church he stood, thus proving… nothing.

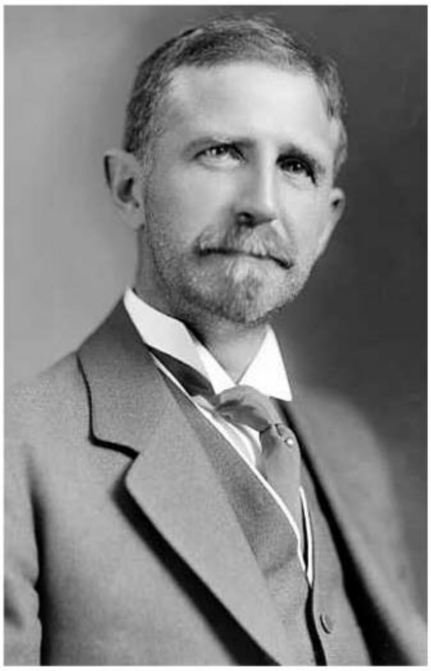
It has sometimes been suggested that Donnelly only wrote his books for money and free publicity to aid him in future election campaigns, but if so then there were probably easier ways of doing so than by spending several years writing the 1,000-page, two-volume work, *The Great Cryptogram*, laying out complex mathematical codes he had supposedly discovered in the Bard's *Complete Works*, which, when deciphered properly, turned out to be secret messages from Bacon drawing attention to the fact that he was the plays' true author and calling Shakespeare fat. In fact, Donnelly believed that the plays themselves were merely "marvellously complicated padding" placed around the hidden messages as a disguise; which, logically, would mean that Bacon wrote Shakespeare purely in order to say that he had written Shakespeare. When the book got deservedly poor reviews, Donnelly managed to convince himself that this was not because it was mad, but because critics were part of a global conspiracy aiming to enslave mankind through capitalism. Only a new form of government, run in the spirit of the noble Francis Bacon, could save it – and the first step in creating that government was to get people to believe Bacon really wrote Shakespeare. The only problem was that most voters didn't care.[2]

DEFYING POLITICAL GRAVITY

There may well have been fewer things in Heaven and Earth than were dreamt of in







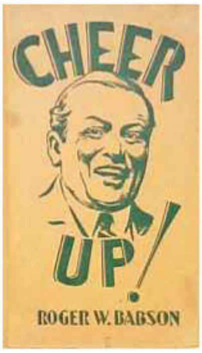
ABOVE LEFT: Ignatius Donnelly and his Baconian cipher. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Warrior against gravity, Roger Babson. **BELOW:** One of Babson's books tackles the Great Depression.

Ignatius's philosophy, but an even more deluded small-party candidate was Roger Babson (1875-1967), who stood for President on behalf of the Prohibition Party in 1940. Babson might have wanted to prevent people from getting wasted on drugs and alcohol, but he was quite happy for them to float eight miles high by another means – namely, through the development of anti-gravity devices. Gravity was Babson's life-long obsession, one which had begun when, whilst still a child, his older sister had drowned in a swimming accident. In a 1948 essay, *Gravity: Our Enemy Number One*, Babson explained how this tragic event had first made him realise that gravity was a malign force, bent on humanity's destruction: "Yes, they say she was 'drowned', but the fact is that... she was unable to fight Gravity, which came up and seized her like a dragon and brought her to the bottom. There she was smothered, and died from lack of oxygen." When, in 1947, his 17-year-old grandson Michael was also drowned by "Old Man Gravity", Babson decided it was time to act, and in 1948 set up his Gravity Research Foundation, which was devoted purely to clipping the dreadful dragon's wings.

In fact, Babson owed quite a lot to gravity, as the title of his autobiography, *Actions and Reactions*, implied. Possessed by an uncontrollable interest in Sir Isaac Newton, who had also previously been subjected to an unprovoked assault by gravity one day whilst sitting quietly beneath an apple-tree, Babson started playing the stock exchange, inventing a method based on Newton's theories to help him beat the market. Essentially, this boiled down to 'what goes up must come down'; when the market soars high, it will eventually crash back down to earth again.

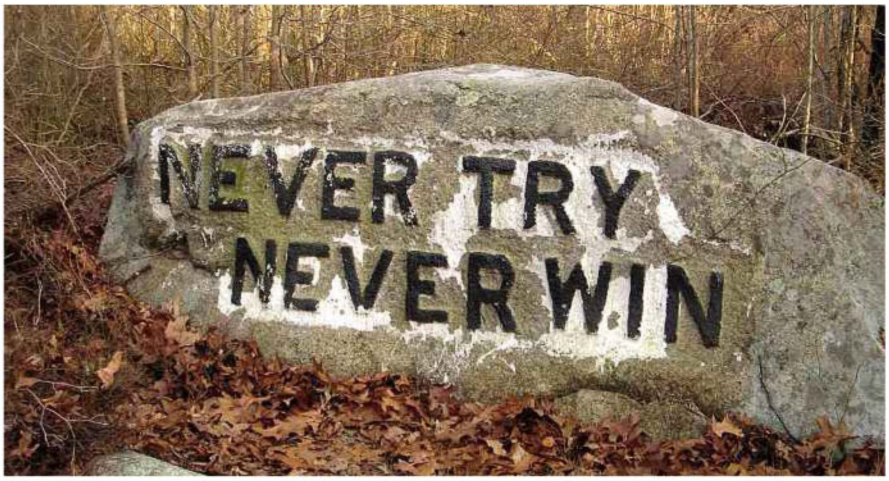
ON 5 SEPTEMBER 1929, BABSON PREDICTED A TERRIFIC CRASH WAS ON THE WAY

On 5 September 1929, Babson gave a speech predicting a "terrific" crash was on its way; hours later, stocks declined by 3 per cent. By 24 October, the Wall Street Crash had struck, and so began the Great Depression – bad news for most men, but not Babson. His reputation was made, and he cashed it in wisely. His already highly successful advice and analysis service, Babson's Reports Inc, went from strength to strength, and he played the market to great effect. When he died in 1967, Babson was worth about $50 million.



He used his immense wealth to enter politics. His choice of allegiance was the Prohibition Party, the oldest existing third party in the US. Founded in 1869, the Prohibitionists helped ensure the passing of the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1919, banning the sale and production of alcohol, but following this success its support declined rapidly. In the Presidential election of 1904, the inappropriately-named Silas C Swallow had gained 258,596 votes, but by the time of Babson's candidacy in 1940, the Prohibitionists were in full-blown Newtonian freefall. Babson was unable to significantly halt the Prohibitionists' decline, however, coming fourth in the contest overall with 58,743 votes. Babson sought an explanation for this dismal electoral failure and eventually found it in... yes, gravity! His paper *Weather Conditions and Political Victories* analysed each Presidential election between 1844 and 1948, 'proving' that gravity had been on the side of most winners. Apparently, gravity affects the weather, the weather effects crop-yields, crop-yields effect business, business effects employment, and employment effects elections. In 75 per cent of cases, said Babson, a Party kept its hold on the Presidency when gravity had ensured good weather, and lost its grip when gravity made bad weather. FDR had thus won his unprecedented third term in 1940 not because of his policies or charisma, but because of pure Newtonian physics.

After predicting the Great Depression through Newtonian means, Babson then generously tried to alleviate its effects by paying the unemployed to perform various deliberately useless tasks, like carving "inspirational business insights" onto large boulders in the abandoned Massachusetts settlement of Dogtown; slogans like 'LOYALTY', 'KEEP OUT OF DEBT', 'HELP MOTHER' and, rather cruelly given the circumstances, 'GET A JOB'. The teetotal Babson was undoubtedly a well-meaning man, who had been first attracted to the Prohibitionists by his religious and moral convictions, but following his grandson's death in 1947 he simply lost all reason,



SHOTINTHEDARK

GRAVITY CONFERENCE HALL

LEFT: One of Babson's many 'inspirational' boulders at Dogtown, Mass. **ABOVE:** The Gravity Research Foundation's conference hall in New Boston, New Hampshire.

blaming gravity for every problem. Sickness and death, for instance, were mostly gravity's fault. As he explained in 1948, gravity "is not only directly responsible for millions of deaths each year" but also for "millions of accidents" in which people fall over and break their hips. Even dodgy digestive systems and constipation were gravity's fault; "intestinal and other internal troubles are directly due to people's inability to counteract gravity at a critical moment", he argued. Fortunately, Babson had the solution – Priscolene, a patented "anti-gravity pill" which he had invented to improve people's circulation.

In another paper, *Gravity and Sitting*, he detailed his belief that ordinary chairs had negative gravitational effects, advising people to give them up altogether and squat around on a low bench with their knees raised and balancing on their bums, as if playing crab-football. Furthermore, by sewing an uncomfortable rubber-ball into the back of your pyjamas, he explained, you could easily prevent the harmful Newtonian effects of sleeping on your back at night; he actually owned Sir Isaac Newton's antique bed, so clearly had special insights into the matter. Another thing Babson noticed was that, as he got older, gravity made it slightly more difficult for him to climb the stairs; his solution was to undertake research into whether or not it would be easier for him to go upstairs during a high-tide, when the stronger gravitational pull of the Moon might help drag him upwards. His paper *Gravity and Ventilation* featured a further original idea: if you are suffering from 'bad air' in your house, then why not make all the floors slope downwards so that gravity will push the miasma out through a convenient hole in the wall? A model-home incorporating this design was actually built; hopefully its furniture wasn't on castors.

The main function of the Gravity Research Foundation was to search for a special, hitherto-unknown alloy of metals with anti-gravity properties that could be used to coat aeroplanes with, thus making it impossible for them to crash. With the unexpected help of 'Captain' Clarence Birdseye, the man who launched a thousand fish-fingers, Babson paid three permanent employees to sit in the US Patent Office at all times, scanning through patent-proposals for anything that might prove useful, and posted thousands of leaflets to universities, laboratories, colleges and schools, asking them to notify him if anyone ever found this secret substance. Plans for what could be done with the alloy were immense. You could coat artificial wings with it, strap them to people and enable them to fly. You could let people walk on water like Jesus. You could even screen people's bodies with it and thereby alter their personalities. Babson claimed that when you nodded your head about, gravity pulled on your brain, affecting your emotions. You could test this out yourself, by getting angry then bowing down in prayer to see what would happen. The resulting sense of calm would be gravity's doing, so shielding citizens from gravity with the alloy would lighten their brains and make them better people. So important was this quest that the Foundation's HQ was located in the remote New Hampshire town of New Boston, which Babson deemed far enough away from civilisation for it to survive Soviet nukes come World War III. Regrettably, Babson's alloy was never found – indeed, had he kept up with Einstein's theories, which showed that gravity was a result of the curvature of space-time, rather than a pure Newtonian force of attraction *per se*, then he would have realised that no such material was actually possible.

The Gravity Research Foundation continues to this day, though its only current function is to run an annual prize awarding $4,000 to the best submitted essay about gravity. It's a prize that is surprisingly well regarded – past winners have included Stephen Hawking! During his lifetime, Babson had also donated grants to various American universities with the stipulation that the money be used to fund anti-gravity research, though much of this cash remained unspent until long after his death. Babson's generosity also ultimately helped fund the establishment of Massachusetts's Tufts Institute of Cosmology in 1989, where a strange graduation ceremony in honour of the great statesman is still held even today. Another of the strings attached to Babson's gifts was that large stone monoliths had to be erected on accepting institutions' campuses, publicising his aims; the one at Tufts reads "THIS MONUMENT HAS BEEN ERECTED BY THE GRAVITY RESEARCH FOUNDATION... IT IS TO REMIND STUDENTS OF THE BLESSINGS FORTHCOMING WHEN A SEMI-INSULATOR IS DISCOVERED IN ORDER TO HARNESS GRAVITY AS A FREE POWER AND REDUCE AIRPLANE ACCIDENTS – 1961." Appropriately enough for such a doomed enterprise, the slab is shaped like a gravestone – and it is here that Tufts graduates must kneel in supplication, while an official drops an apple on their heads to remind them of mankind's eternal debt to both Newton and his great 20th-century disciple.[3] FT

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

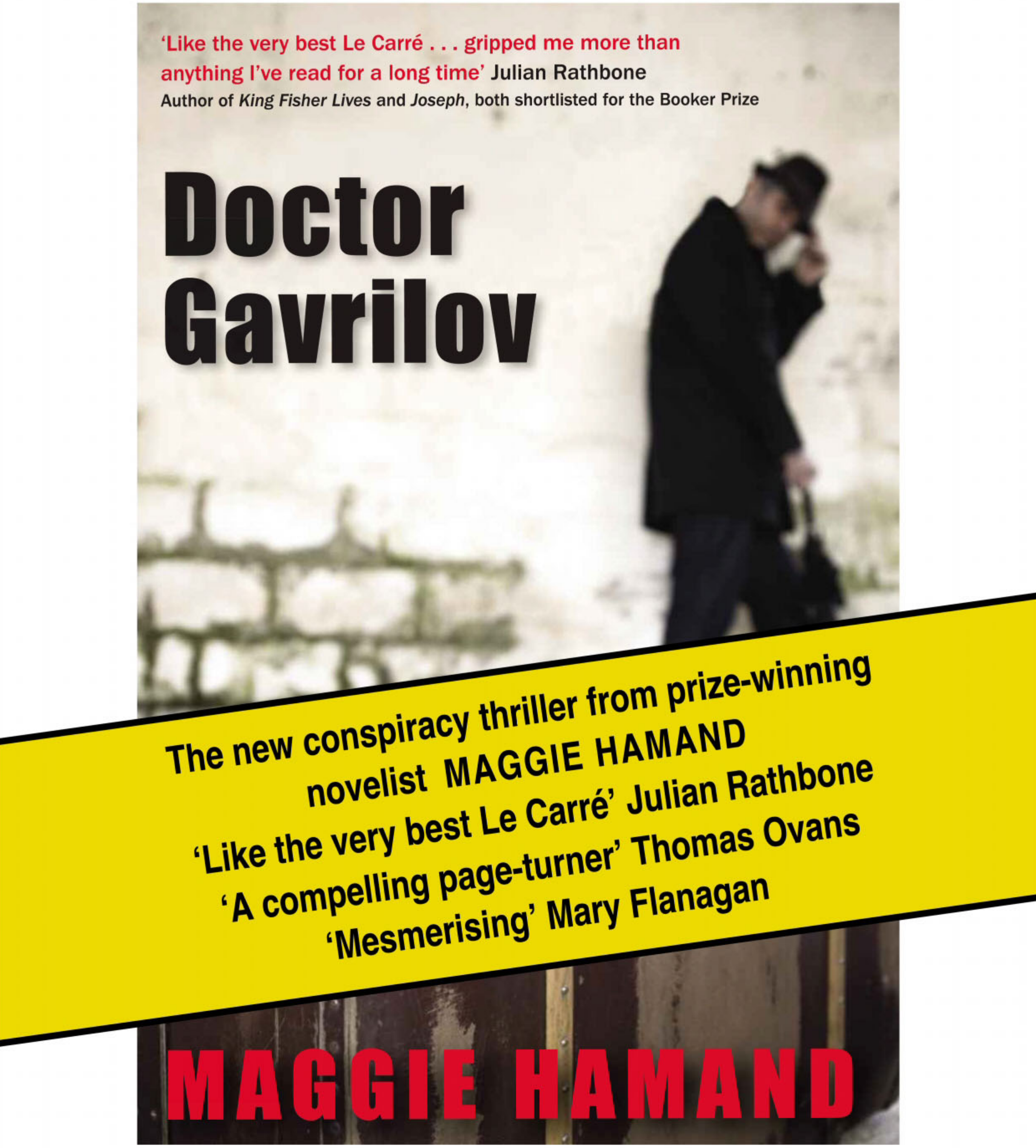
SD TUCKER is a regular contributor to FT whose books are *Paranormal Merseyside*, *Terror of the Tokoloshe* and (forthcoming) *The Hidden Folk*. His *Great British Eccentrics* is available now from Amberley Publishing.

NOTES

[1] *Times*, 24 Oct 2015; http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/11310031/Meet-the-Transhumanist-Party-Want-to-live-forever-Vote-for-me.html

[2] John Michell, *Eccentric Lives and Peculiar Notions*, Adventures Unlimited, 1999, pp201-211; Martin Gardner, *Fads & Fallacies in the Name of Science*, Dover, 1959, pp35-37; 164-166.

[3] Gardner, pp92-100; www.prohibitionists.org/history/roger_babson_bio.htm; www.popsci.com/science/article/2011-03/gravitys-sworn-enemy-roger-babson-and-gravity-research-foundation; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prohibition_Party; www.gravityresearchfoundation.org/origins.html; Babson's essay 'Gravity: Our Enemy Number One' is reprinted in Harry Collins, *Gravity's Shadow*, University of Chicago Press, 2004.



'Like the very best Le Carré . . . gripped me more than anything I've read for a long time' Julian Rathbone
Author of *King Fisher Lives* and *Joseph*, both shortlisted for the Booker Prize

Doctor
Gavrilov

The new conspiracy thriller from prize-winning
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MAGGIE HAMAND

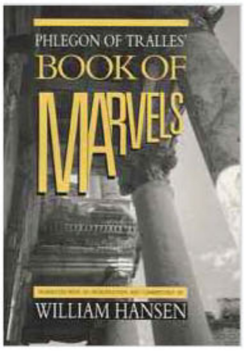
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS

BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

9. PARADOXOGRAPHY: FORTEANA BEFORE FORT

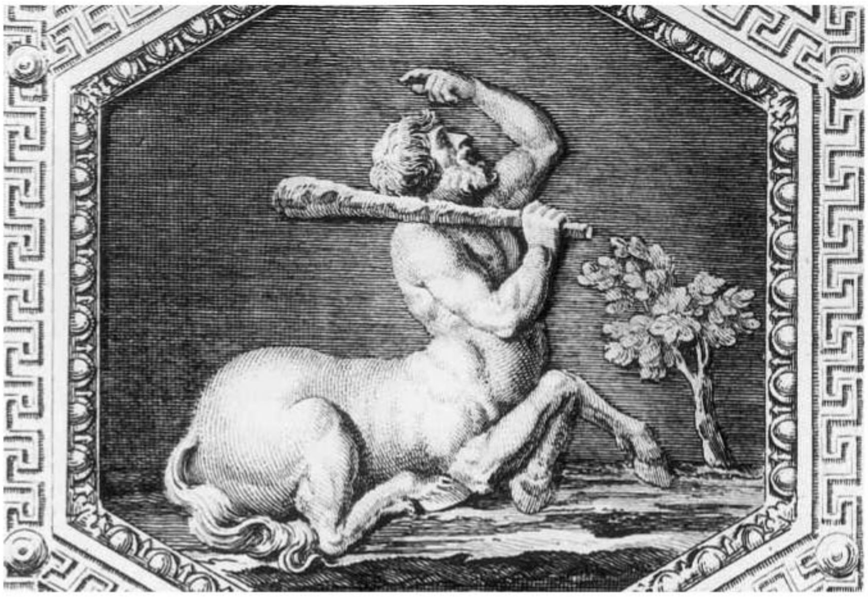
The umbrella term 'paradoxography' was perhaps first used in the 12th century by Tzetzes (*Histories* 2.154); Rachel Hardiman, of the University of Amsterdam, helpfully tells us on her website that in latter days it "was used by Westermann for his 1839 edition of the *Scriptores Rerum Mirabilium Graeci*, most of whose authors included either of the adjectives *θαυμάσιος* (wondrous, miraculous, marvelous) or *παράδοξος* (strange, incredible, beyond expectation) in their titles. It is… parasitic on historical, geographical, ethnographical and scientific writings, [and] it dons the guise of Alexandrian scholarship in the careful citation of the sources on which are constructed its claims to truth. Indeed, at the fount of this genre stands no less a figure than Callimachus, who… provided a catalogue of marvels from all the world using as sources, among others, Aristotle, Megasthenes, Theophrastus, Theopompus and Timaeus." Hardiman goes on to elaborate, in the slightly convoluted language of the academy, that "Paradoxography… depends for its effect on decontextualization; it constructs a conceptual space where, there being no given norm against which to measure them, the fantastic and unbelievable themselves become the norm… Yet these marvels are all 'true', all culled from 'authorities'", because paradoxography "could not exist without the prior and contemporaneous existence of a body of 'real' knowledge of the human and natural worlds, based on careful empirical observation and rational analysis, for it is on such knowledge that it depends for its validation." *Plus ça change*: then, as now, purveyors of anomalies look to, by implication depend upon, and yet contradict, established disciplines of knowledge in the hope of acquiring credibility and respectability. A paradox in itself. Another anticipation of modern mystery-mongers was a tendency to repeat second- or third-hand testimony, and sometimes elaborate on it.

Scholars tell that the first paradoxographer was Kallimachos (*c*.310–240 BC), whose writings unfortunately exist now only in fragments or in the citations of others. Depending on whom you read, somewhere between 20 and 40 other such authors busied themselves with 'paradoxical' subjects over the next six or so centuries, and of them only seven works survive complete: among them the *Περι Θαυμασίο* or *Mirabilia* or *Book of Marvels* of Phlegon of Tralles (second century AD) and the Latin *Liber Prodigiorum* of Julius Obsequens (mid fourth century AD), which we feature here in the translations of Prof William Hansen and Dr Alex Nice respectively. The dedicated paradoxographers were by no means the only ones of the era to record bizarre events and weird phenomena, as the citations in international treasure Barry Baldwin's 'Classical Corner' in this journal attest: just for instance, the great fifth-century BC Greek historian Herodotus specifically stated that he would include wonders and marvels in his chronicles; and Julius Obsequens harvested his prodigies from Livy.



In his introduction, Hansen explains that these anthologies formed part of a growing fashionable taste for collections and compendia, whether of jokes, fables, natural history, or travellers' tales. Phlegon was distinguished from the run of paradoxographers (who tended to concentrate on odd natural phenomena) by his focus on strange tales about people – and their ghosts. But otherwise he conformed to type: the compilers presented their material "not to illustrate general principles or to facilitate the discovery of new knowledge, but solely for the pleasure of its immediate interest", and so offered little or no commentary, explanation, or context. Hansen finds connections between some of Phlegon's tales and traditional folklore as well as modern supermarket tabloid tales. *A propos* the latter, Dr Jason Davies has commented (*Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 97.5.8): "For Phlegon… to record a story about a hermaphrodite cannot be easily compared to an interest in whether Elvis was in fact abducted by aliens nowadays. The writers of such stories are (I hope) not high-ranking civil servants or whatever approximate equivalent we would like to suggest for an imperial freedman on Hadrian's staff." We take the point, although there comes to mind a certain *low*-ranking civil servant who's written such stories (minus Elvis and the hermaphrodites – so far). Hansen also seems to miss what we'd opine was a closer parallel with urban/contemporary legends than with folklore in its broader sense when he says that "a *paradoxon* purports to convey a remarkable and interesting phenomenon… that may not be true or may not be wholly true… but is striking and wondrous nevertheless." Yet by eschewing commentary, Phlegon implies that we are to understand his accounts indeed to be true, just as we are offered contemporary legends, at least when retailed in the club bar, as veridical. As Prof. JR Morgan said in reviewing Hansen (*Histos 2*, 1999, pp302–7), "In paradoxography the incredible has to be true, or at least believable as truth, otherwise there is no point."

At this point we run into problems of perception, if sufficiently erudite. Phlegon's first (surviving) story tells of a guest at the house of Charito and Demostratos in Amphipolis, one Machates, who enjoys the favours of an irresistible young lady who visits him discreetly over several nights. The couple are eventually discovered by the children's nurse, and much kerfuffle ensues, for the nurse recognises that the girl is Philinnion, Charito's and Demostratos's daughter – who, we now learn, has been dead, lo! this last half-year. The next night, Machates and her parents wait for her to appear as usual. As she does, but isn't exactly overjoyed when embraced by her parents. "How unfairly you have begrudged my being with the guest… since I have caused no one any pain. For this reason, on account of your meddling, you shall grieve all over again, and I shall return to the place appointed for me. For it was not without divine will that I came here." One looks in vain for any sign of the alleged grudge or meddling, in Phlegon's version of the story. Nonetheless, Philinnion petulantly and promptly falls down dead upon the bed, and there ensues "much confusion and wailing in the house because of the calamity." Her tomb is searched



ABOVE AND LEFT: Centaurs and hermaphrodites – just two of the pleasures Phlegon offers readers.

> “WITHOUT WORDS, WITHOUT WRITING AND WITHOUT BOOKS THERE WOULD BE NO HISTORY, THERE COULD BE NO CONCEPT OF HUMANITY.”
>
> *Herman Hesse*

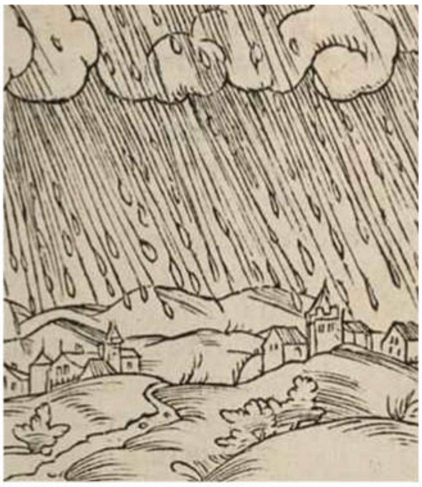
and found to be empty; in due course the city’s most respected seer pronounces that her relicts should be burned outside the city limits and sacrifices made; Machates “became despondent and killed himself.”

Prof. Morgan (*loc. cit.*) alerts us to the background of this tale: “We know from a much later summary (translated as an appendix by Hansen) of the same story by Proklos, who apparently knew it directly rather than as part of Phlegon’s collection, that there was originally a series of letters, including at least one addressed by the superior, Arrhidaios, Macedonian governor of Amphipolis, to king Philip II... although the convention of ego-narrative with hindsight is employed to give authority to the story, it is clearly not a real letter about a real contemporary event. In fact… it is clear that we are dealing with an accomplished fiction… However, the very conventions by which a practised reader would have identified it as a realistic fiction lured Phlegon and Proklos into accepting it as fact, and it is as fact that it is included in Phlegon’s collection. Thus Phlegon’s reader is invited to read the self-same text with a different set of mental spectacles, and therefore with a different set of responses: a pleasurably spooky epistolary fiction becomes one of a series of documentary proofs of the supernatural. The history of the piece becomes even more interesting in that it inspired Goethe’s ballad, *The Bride of Corinth* (usefully given in another appendix), which reworks it as Gothic romanticism...” Some sourpuss somewhere might regard this as nasty, negative debunking. We prefer to think it’s illuminating – and it’s still a great story. For your homework, compare and contrast Prof. Morgan’s exegesis with the history of the legends of the Angels of Mons, Oliver Lerch, and any ONE alien-abduction account of your choice. Do not write on both sides of the paper at once.

Other gems in Phlegon’s *Marvels* are: a couple more ghost stories, tales of sex-changers – a few dramatically occurring on wedding night (bit of a shock) – and hermaphrodites, finds of giants’ bones, bizarre births (shades of Mary Tofts and more), and eye-witness accounts of centaurs. In his collection Hansen includes Phlegon’s catalogue – mostly and for once compiled from official records – of long-lived persons (*περί μακροβίων*) and the extant fragments of his work on the Olympiads. Hansen’s commentary is mostly invaluable. One’s only real grump is that he didn’t include the Greek text in the book. Get it if you can (is not cheap).

The hermaphrodites bear a closer look, as they feature in Obsequens’s text too. Time and again we hear of new-born hermaphrodites being judged by city elders and cast out, beyond the city limits or into the sea, to die. They were regarded as ‘against nature’ and likely portents of misfortune. The outlook contrasts with that of the Nuer, of south Sudan, who would classify monstrous human births as baby hippopotamuses, and lay them gently in the river where they belong. Same result, but a kindlier attitude. Hermaphrodites were clearly, in that favourite term of ours, ‘liminal’ beings and, as such, dangerous. Over the centuries this attitude softened – at least in the abstract – until in the post-Classical period one finds statues of *ερμαφρόδιτες ανασυρόμενοι* (***hermaphródites anasyrómenoi***) being used to ward off the evil eye. Says Vanessa Di Francesco, in ‘Breaking the Mould’: “Plutarch wrote that apotropaic objects succeeded in warding off evil in part because of their strange or surprising appearance; that which is odd attracts the envious and destructive ‘Gaze of the Eye… deflecting it from potential victims.’ What could be more strange or surprising than the hermaphrodite’s sexual incongruity? … She herself looks down to catch a glimpse of the surprise, thereby further inviting the viewer to behold it.” (http://cujah.org/essay-4-volume-vii/; for modern apotropaic traditions see pp28-35 of this issue)

Phlegon tells one of the weirdest of hermaphrodite stories. Polykritos the Aitolarch marries a Lokrian woman; this proves too much for his frame, and after three nights’ marital bliss he dies. In due course his widow gives birth to “a child with two sets of genitals”. Both mother and child are in danger of being burnt beyond the frontier. At which point, the ghost of Polykritos appears among the assembled citizens and, once the general astonishment has abated, pleads to be given his disconcerting offspring. This, he

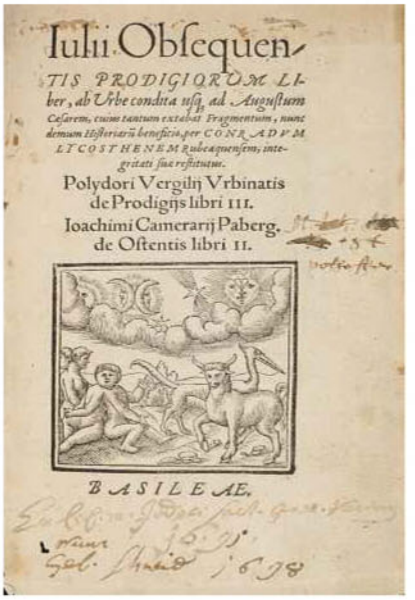


says, will ward off the impending catastrophe that the child portends. Argument breaks out over what to do; eventually Polykritos's spectre loses patience, takes hold of the child, and summarily tears it into pieces – then eats the lot, all except the head. And then he vanishes. That might be enough for some: but the infant head proceeds to utter a less than cheering oracle. This the Aitolians obey as best they can. What happened to the unfortunate mother we are, of course, not told.

Dr Alex Nice's online parallel text of Julius Obsequens's one surviving work at least lets one pick nits from the Latin should one choose or, by quoting it, improve one's credentials as a dodgy scholar. Many more mad things happen in Obsequens's accounts than in Phlegon's, of prodigious events and portents in Rome between about 249 and 12 BC. Mules give birth. Mysterious fires break out. There are rains of stones. A typical account from AD 167: "At Rome several sacred and secular places were struck from the sky. At Anagnia it rained earth. At Lanuvium a blazing torch was seen in the sky. At Calatia in public land for three days and two nights blood flowed. The King of Illyricum, Gentius, and Perses of Macedonia were defeated."

The following year, "a flying kite sent a weasel that had been snatched up from the *cella* [the inner area of the temple, housing the hidden cult image] of Jupiter into the middle of the senators' meeting. Around the same time the temple of Salus was struck from the sky. On the Quirinal hill blood drenched the earth. At Lanuvium a torch was seen in the night sky. Many places at Cassinum were shattered by lightning and the sun was seen at night for some hours. At Teanum Sidicinum a boy with four hands and the same number of feet was born. After the city had been lustrated [ritually purified] there was peace at home and abroad."

Some things to note here. Lanuvium seems to have been a bit of a hotspot (window area?) for aerial 'torches', and it is from such vague references to celestial curiosities that various persons have constructed a theory, or even maxim, that UFOs (in the ET sense) have infested our skies since forever. Flows and rains of blood, dirt, *etc.*, of course, were a favourite of Charles Fort. There is a typical bit of urban legendry and presumption in the kite-and-weasel story: how did anyone know that the weasel came from the temple's inner sanctum? And how did the kite get into it, or out? We're not told, and enquiring minds would like to know. Between these two entries – as throughout the *Liber Prodigiorum* – there is no consistency between the outcome of the apparent portents. It's noticeable here because the entries are so close together and have some reported phenomena in common. But the first ends with a military victory and the other "peace at home and abroad". In other entries, e.g. for 163 BC, the Sun shines at night, celestial trumpets are heard, and at Caere "a pig was born with human hands and feet, and boys with four feet and four hands", but there seem to have been no political consequences at all. In 130 BC, we're told, it rained milk, a prætor was struck by lightning, the statue of Apollo wept for four days, and when Antiochus of Syria ignored the swallows that nested in his tent, he was killed in battle. In 113 BC, "The Alban Mount seemed to be on fire at night. A small temple and a standard were struck from the sky. The altar of Salus was smashed asunder. The land in Lucania and Privernum gaped open. In Gaul the sky seemed to be on fire. After crossing the Alps the Cimbri and Teutones cruelly slaughtered the Romans and their allies." And so, because of the reluctance of the paradoxographers to comment on their catalogues, we have no idea (short of doctoral research, which perhaps someone has done) *why* such similar 'portents' had certain consequences, or none at all, or meant something different this year from what they signified last year.



Iulii Obſequentis PRODIGIORUM Liber, ab Urbe condita uſq; ad Auguſtum Cæſarem, cuius tantum extabat Fragmentum, nunc demum Hiſtoriarũ beneficio, per CONRADUM LYCOSTHENEM Rubeaquenſem, integritati ſuæ reſtitutus.
Polydori Vergilij Urbinatis de Prodigijs libri III.
Ioachimi Camerarij Paberg. de Oſtentis libri II.

BASILEAE.

ABOVE: Julius Obsequens's *Liber Prodigiorum*, in an edition dating from 1552.

But still, Obsequens is full of good stuff. Consider this (from 114 BC): "In Apulia when P Elvius a Roman knight was returning from the Roman games, in the territory of Stella, his unmarried daughter sitting astride her horse was struck and killed by lightning, her clothing was stripped from her privates, her tongue stuck out, as though the fire had leapt through her lower regions to her mouth. The response was that this portended disgrace to young maidens and the equestrian order, because the decorations of the horse had been disarrayed. At the same time three of the most noble Vestal Virgins paid the penalty for incest with some Roman knights. A temple to Venus Verticordia was built." At least there's a certain logic to this, given that there were only six Vestal virgins to start with, and it was Venus Verticordia's business to convert lust to chastity. And then eight years later, at Amiternum, a boy was born of a slave-girl, and he said 'hello'. One could go on, about speaking bulls (we're never told *what* they said), rains of milk or stones and potsherds, women giving birth to serpents, lambs born with horses' feet or the head of a monkey, the spike of corn that grew from a woman's nose and 'discharged' kernels – which reminds us of the ancient warning against eating cherry stones: a tree would grow out your belly-button, just like it did with your Aunt Moira's neighbour's fiancé's nephew when 'e was on National Service in Burma. And much, much more! Download or buy it, and you'll see how ancient – or should we say classical? – forteana is.

Phlegon of Tralles' Book of Marvels, translation and commentary by William Hansen, University of Exeter Press, 1996

Julius Obsequens, *Liber Prodigiorum*, parallel text with translation by Dr Alex Nice, http://www.alexthenice.com/obsequens/text/text.html

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Rachel Hardiman's website: https://sites.google.com/site/paradoxography/about-paradoxography#TOC-Callimachus-

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In search of the Little Blue Man

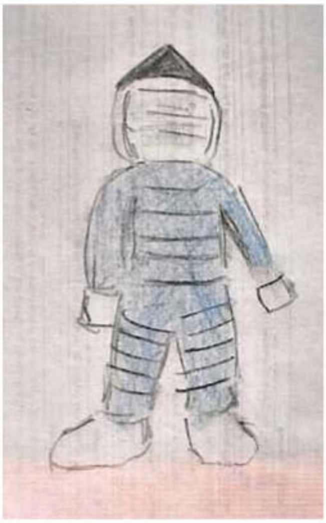
In 1967, a group of schoolboys had a curious encounter on Studham Common, Dunstable. Nearly five decades later, **THEO PAIJMANS** tracked down the primary witness, who shared his memories of a very strange day.

THEO PAIJMANS Theo Paijmans contributes regularly to *Fortean Times* and other publications. He is the author of the books *The Vril Society* and *Free Energy Pioneer: John Worrell Keely*, which was recently published in Japan.

We will probably never know what a group of boys from Dunstable saw on 28 January 1967. It was a rainy day, with an oppressive atmosphere. On their way to Studham Lower School, the boys approached the Dell, an isolated inclination with undergrowth and bushes. Suddenly a flash of lightning struck nearby and Alex Butler, one of the boys, saw something that, after half a century, still can't be explained. A very little blue man with a tall hat and beard was standing motionless on the opposite bank. The other boys saw it too. They began to run towards the creature, but it disappeared in a puff of smoke. The little man appeared in another spot, and the boys changed course and ran towards him – but again he disappeared in a puff of smoke. As the vanishing act was repeated for a third time, the boys heard a deep-toned sound – they described it as sounding like foreign voices – emanating from two different spots nearby. Then, in the distance, the school whistle sounded; the boys dashed off, and their weird experience was at an end.

Miss Newcomb, the school's headmistress, interviewed the distraught children and collected their written reports in a scrapbook, which, sadly, is now lost. Their description of the mini-man has survived, however: he was 3ft (90cm) tall and wore a 2ft (60cm) tall, brimless bowler hat with a rounded top. Two round eyes and a small flat triangle for a nose adorned his face. The dwarf was clothed in a one-piece garment with a broad black belt and a black box in front. He held his short arms close to his sides. A beard split to both sides of the chest. A dim glow enveloped the little man, giving him his blue colour. As one of the boys commented in the *Dunstable Gazette* a few days later: "I and my friends were startled, he was horrid". The newspaper account made its way to the London-based UFO publication *Flying Saucer Review*. The boys were re-interviewed, the results were published in its pages and the legend was born of what has since become known as 'The Little Blue Man of Studham Common'.

I contacted the Dunstable Historical Society and wrote an article for their newsletter in the hope that it might reawaken memories. A few people from Dunstable, although not being able to comment on the sighting, did remember that there had been something that set that day apart from the other days: the weather had been "very odd indeed… thundery and overcast". Andrea Maxted remembered being woken up that morning by what sounded like a sonic boom. Village milkman George Thorne, making his deliveries at Swannells Wood, was shocked by a loud bang and a rush of wind that bent the trees double. His friends later pulled his leg for being frightened by a bit of thunder but this, he said, "was different".



ABOVE: Alex Butler's sketch of what he remembers seeing on 28 January 1967.

The *Dunstable Gazette* picked up on my article and, as luck would have it, it came to the attention of principal eyewitness Alex Butler who contacted me. "Certainly the events published in the media took place," he wrote to me, "and all of us boys were convinced that we had experienced and seen what were described as little blue men. However, reflecting back I look at it in this way. A group of impressionable 10-year-olds went to the common on a normal lunch break to look around the common/dell and to play games. During

BELOW LEFT: The path to the Dell.

BELOW RIGHT: Studham Lower School, where young Alex was a pupil.

PHOTOS: DIANE EARL

DIANE EARL

FLYING SAUCER REVIEW

this time, the weather worsened and it became thundery, which to a degree spooked us boys, and this is when the well-publicised events took place. A more rational explanation, although there is no evidence to back this up, is that maybe some older boys probably decided to play tricks on us by popping up at certain places around the dell in their blue uniforms, and this maybe is what we observed. But as mentioned because of the weather conditions, including lightning, perhaps we whipped ourselves into a frenzy and convinced ourselves we had seen something either paranormal or of an alien origin. We were all certainly convinced that we had seen something extraordinary at the time, but as I say a more rational explanation is given above."

Many years have passed since the incident, and my interviews with him mark the first time that Mr Butler has relived his childhood experience and answered questions about what happened so long ago. Understandably, his recollections are a bit hazy; yet describing the first encounter, he does remember: "Yes, but fairly vaguely. At this point we were pretty spooked by the thunder, but I saw what looked like a 'little blue man' scurrying in the bushes at the top end of the dell. It was raining and the conditions were not good, therefore the image was not perfect. I pointed out to the others what I had seen, greeted with scepticism initially, and we decided to investigate."

At my request, Mr Butler was kind enough to sketch a drawing of the Little Blue Man as much as he could remember it today. When asked why the drawing did not resemble the descriptions given almost half a century ago, he answered: "Yes, some pointed out a beard, but I couldn't remember that so well so I can only put what I recall. Again I think the shape of the thing on his head was more like the picture I have attached. The feature standing out was the speed that they seemed to disappear and what appeared to be a puff of smoke at this time."

Mr Butler still recalls the fright the sound similar to deep voices gave the boys: "It certainly did. When we approached close to where the object was seen, this is when we heard strange noises from behind the bushes." They were so distraught that, once they arrived back at school, Miss Newcomb took note and interrogated them. "She reacted very sceptically initially, but after sitting the boys down individually and finding out the stories tallied, she then became positively involved and interested in finding out what had actually happened," Mr Butler recalls. Unfortunately, he has no recollection of the elusive scrapbook she made that was mentioned in the pages of *Flying Saucer Review*: "I do not even recall that she had done so", he comments.

A few months later, after the boys' weird experience was reported in the press, a cadre of representatives from *Flying Saucer Review* descended on Dunstable and interviewed the group. Does he feel now that the interviewers were perhaps leading him? "I believe they were fair in the way they conducted themselves. I cannot recall them leading us on, but again my recollection all these years later is very hazy." When their experience became known in the local community, Mr Butler met with a variety of responses. "A mixture of amusement, excitement, and immense interest. I remember being interrogated, in a nice way mostly, on a number of occasions, but, again, many were sceptical of our accounts." Nobody, though, approached young Alex to confide to him that they had had similar experiences – "No, not that I am aware" – making whatever the boys saw, or claimed to have seen, unique.

There is one interesting postscript to their bizarre encounter that would never repeat itself. I asked Mr Butler if this was his only anomalous experience, or was there more lurking in the biography of the principal witness of the Little Blue Man of Studham Common? His memory was stirred and a long forgotten incident surfaced. "Actually, yes, probably about four years after the incident, I remember a visit to Studham Church. In those days everything was open and a group of us went to enter the belfry at the back of the church, as we had done on a number of occasions before. On this occasion the belfry door appeared to be locked, which had never happened before, whilst at the same time we heard noises and footsteps coming from the inside. However, when a friend and I looked underneath the bottom of the door (through a large gap where the door fell short of the floor), we could see that there was nobody visible on the other side. Through the gap you could see every area of the belfry, so I cannot explain why we were able to hear noises and footsteps, but not see anything. Naturally we were spooked, and ran a mile as fast as we were able!" FT

FLYING SAUCER
REVIEW

VOL. 13, No. 4

13th YEAR OF PUBLICATION

UFO OVER VENICE?

THE LITTLE BLUE MAN ON
STUDHAM COMMON

TOP LEFT: The Dell today, overgrown with vegetation.

TOP RIGHT: Young Alex photgraphed for *Flying Saucer Review* near where he saw the Little Blue Man.

ABOVE: The 1967 issue of *FSR* that featured the Studham Common case.

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Where the wild things are

CHARLES FOSTER wonders whether he can become real by becoming a beast...

CHARLES FOSTER is a Fellow of Green Templeton College, Oxford. He holds a doctorate in medical law and ethics and is a qualified veterinary surgeon. He has written books on philosophy, the biology of religious experience and the evolution of altruism and community.

In his new book Charles Foster has tried to enter the worlds of a badger (living in a sett in the Black Mountains and eating earthworms), an otter (swimming the rivers of Exmoor and catching fish in his mouth), an urban fox (rummaging through the dustbins of London's East End), a red deer (being hunted by bloodhounds on Exmoor) and a swift (obsessively following the migration route from Oxford, across Europe, and down the West Coast of Africa). In this excerpt he looks back at the book, and wonders if he's been wasting his time.

"So: what's this book about, then?"

I was sitting on an island with a well-known Greek poet who harrumphed dismissively into his moustache between glasses of Peloponnesian red.

I told him what I thought it was about.

"Impossible." He meant absurd, but was too gracious to say so. "It's like trying to live in a fifth dimension. You can describe it mathematically, but you can't give any account of what it would be like to live in it."

"No," I said, "it's not like that. Or if it is, then it makes me doubt whether I have any real human relationships. I'm in the same three spatial dimensions as a fox, and the fourth dimension, time, flows just as mysteriously and erratically for other humans as it does for foxes. True, foxes might get several years' worth of information in a momentary sniff – so telescoping time. But that's not unimaginably different in kind from me flicking quickly through a family photo album."

The poet raised his eyebrows and looked pityingly sophisticated.

I went on, but I didn't know why: "You've got a nose. It's so much more fastidious than the average – and certainly than mine – that you've brought your own bottle of wine with you to this perfectly nice taverna. Yet I can have some idea of what you mean by 'wine', and even by 'good wine', and even by some of the adjectives you'd use to describe good wine. And even if I can't now, I could learn. I could awaken my nose."

"But," said he, "I can't have the first idea what it's like to live in the world of a Southern Baptist from Alabama. You can't re-educate your psyche to know anything at all about that."

I agreed with him. That is indeed the world of the fifth or sixth or seventh dimension. But the comparison gave me hope. "Quite right," I said. "I share much more with a fox than with a fundamentalist. I've lived and I live with the fox in an embodied, sensual world of wood and earth and bone and semen and cold. We met and we meet in a real place, and there I've started to use the words 'I and thou'. The 'I' has grown in the encounters, I can tell you. If the 'I' has grown, why not the 'thou'? If we grow in the same soil, and in the light beaming from the other, isn't that a sort of knowledge of the other?"

He rolled his eyes, took another swig of the unapproachably, incomprehensibly good wine and moved on to the accents of Cretans and Thracians.

The taverna looked out on to an olive grove where, in happier, wiser times, cloven-footed Pan had serenaded and impregnated the maidens of Ký́thira. Like any decent or indecent mænad I drank the wine made from the grapes just down the road, and eventually the premise of the book didn't seem so ludicrous. I thought it was fair, if not encouraging, to judge it by its fruits.

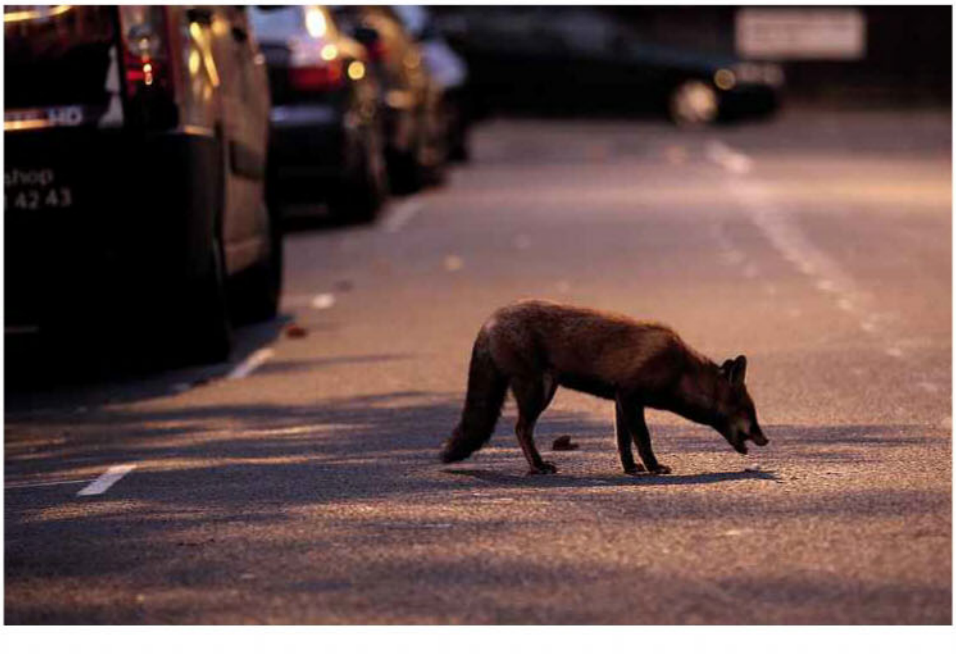
I grew up on the edge. On the edge of a community (we never really belonged anywhere) and on the seam of a city and the wilderness. At night I'd walk up a few polite streets, and then the neon would give up and I'd be looking down at the city: one foot on the heather, another on the tarmac; one foot in the light, another in the dark.

Those night walks defined me. I was made by the edges. Take them away, and I'd dissolve. I couldn't survive on either the heather or the tarmac.

I wondered if other people were the same. I still wonder. Selfishly I hope so. I'd like to meet them.

I grew up, therefore, both suspicious of frontiers and totally dependent on them. Then, after a bit of wandering and reading, I wondered if humans could cross the frontiers that separate them from other species. Those frontiers seemed pretty artificial – defined by the taxonomical conventions of the day. And by all accounts they had been routinely violated (as the Judæo-Christian tradition, with its love of separation, would put it) or rapturously and enrichingly penetrated (as shaggy

BELOW: "Foxes seem to *enjoy* being outrageous. They flaunt their thriving in conditions that are objectively wretched".



OLI SCARF / GETTY IMAGES

people who played the pipes and seemed to have more fun would put it) in most cultures other than our own.

I could have gone down the stern, merry, green path of the shaman. But I was too scared. Instead I took up birdwatching and philosophical abstraction.

So far as the abstraction goes, I'm interested in three questions. Although it might not have been obvious, I've been exploring them in *Being a Beast*.

The first flows directly from heather, tarmac and shamanism: are there any limits to our ability to choose?

The fact that we have at least some autonomy is awesome and intimidating. We're used to thinking that autonomy is most critically on trial in dramatic, occasional situations – such as when we're considering the right to assisted suicide. But surely it's the day-to-day choices that are the most terrifying and repercussive. Listen: You can choose whether to get up early, run round a field, have a cold bath and then read *Middlemarch*. Or stay in bed and watch shopping TV. That's astonishing. I can never get over it. That's a choice between Life and Death. Therefore choose Life.

We're used to saying, at least to ourselves: "There's nothing I can't do or be if I put my mind to it." But is it true?

There's a good test for this. If I can become a badger, then there are good reasons to be confident more generally about our autonomy.

The second question is to do with identity and authenticity.

I've often worried that there's nothing to me. Or at least that, if there is something to me, it's highly labile. I would like to be reassured that there's an indestructible core of Charles Fosterishness.

One way of testing this is by becoming a fox and seeing if the fox still smells distinctively of me.

The third question relates to otherness.

I worry that I'm entirely alone in the world: that otherness is wholly inaccessible. That when I think I'm in a relationship, I'm not. That all conversations are ultimately at cross purposes. That I neither understand nor am understood by any other.

There's an exercise that might be able to help. If I can establish a real relationship with a non-human animal, there are grounds for optimism in relation to relationships with humans. If I can bond with a swift, I may well be able to bond with my children. True, I won't be able to prove in a Euclidean sort of way that I'm really relating to the swift. But the human-animal relationship will be simpler than the human-human one and won't be obscured by so much tangled emotion. That means it might be easier to be reassured that a human-animal relationship is real. If it is, and it tastes like the same sort of thing as a human-human relationship, I'll be able to love my children less doubtfully.

TOP: "Normally badgers are creatures of routine: sleep, wake, stretch, defecate in one of the sett's prescribed lavatories, eat earthworms, sleep, repeat."

These are what I was working on in the mountains, moors, rivers, seas and skies.

I made, I think, a bit of progress.

Our anatomy and physiology impose some limits on us. And if (as seems highly unlikely) we're mortal, so does our mortality. I can't fly. Nor is there time to learn all the words necessary to compensate poetically for my absence of wings.

But our capacity for vicariousness is infinite. Empathise enough with a swift and you'll either become one or (which may be the same thing) you'll be able to rejoice so much with the screeching race round the church tower that you'll not mind not being one yourself.

For better or for worse, Charles Foster continued to smell of himself when he crawled, slashed and dived. Indeed, he smelt *more* of himself. That wasn't, I think, because the whole exercise of transformation was a failure, but rather an illustration of the general principle that the more you give away, the more you get back. In any event, it was reassuring. There's *something* in me that's distinctive and worth working on.

I've seen and known some animal others. The woods are full of slinking 'thous'! I've been held in a yard in the East End of London by the commanding vertical pupil of an insolent fox. I've had enough beckoning and threatening looks across crowded bars to know reciprocity and its absence when I see them.

This is immensely exciting. There's a chance that I can know and be known!

There was a fourth, less abstract question. Do my animals live in the same world as I do? Do they swim in the same water, forage in the same dustbins, dig in the same earth, look across the same misty Channel to Wales and smell the same rising tide of decay from the Gulf of Guinea?

I've left it until last because my thoughts about it change about every half an hour, and I hoped for a while that they would start to crystallise.

They haven't, and I'm so glad.

I can't always be in the wild. Sometimes I have to be in places that smell of fear, fumes and ambition. When I'm there, it helps very much to know that badgers are asleep inside a Welsh hill, that an otter is turning over stones in one of the Rockford pools, that a fox is blinking in the same sun that makes me sweat in my tweed coat, that a red stag is cudding among ghost trees by a stone circle near Hoar Oak, and that there's a swift, hatched above my Oxford study, hunting, almost beyond human sight, in the high, hot blue over the Congo River.

That these things should be a comfort is strange. They should taunt, not comfort. They should say: "You're not there. Ha, ha, ha."

Why does that not happen?

Well, I note that I get a similar sense of comfort only from being assured of the continued existence of things – and notably people – that (whatever love is) I love.

Perhaps, then (whatever love means), I *love* these creatures. I cringe at the thought. I've been terrified of anthropomorphism, and here I am, apparently guilty of the very worst kind.

It gets worse. Because the sort of love I'm talking about (whatever it is) is necessarily reciprocal. I can't really love X unless X loves me.

Now there's a thought.

BEING A BEAST
CHARLES FOSTER

Being a Beast **by Charles Foster is published by Profile Books in the UK, RRP £14.99 and will be published by Metropolitan in the US in May.**

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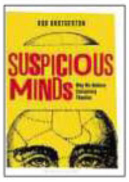
Like nailing jelly to a wall

Conspiracists are less inclined to think logically and rationally than the general population, and as for showing them sound scientific evidence against their beliefs...



Suspicious Minds

Why We Believe Conspiracy Theories

Rob Brotherton

Bloomsbury Sigma 2015
Hb, 304pp, £16.99, notes, ind, ISBN 9781472915610
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £14.99

For many readers of *FT*, conspiracy theorists are the bane of our lives. You're having a drink with a bunch of people, and suddenly someone who had previously appeared sensible and intelligent says, "Of course, the Moon landings were faked; it's obvious" or "Scientists have proved that vaccinations are harmful to babies" or "Everyone knows that the American government was behind 9/11". Do you engage them in sensible evidential (and hopefully non-acrimonious) argument, or do you just smile politely and walk away from the crazy person?

In this fascinating and often startling book, Rob Brotherton reveals that the crazy people may well be completely wrong in their beliefs, but they are no more crazy than you and me.

People have been coming up with conspiracy theories for centuries. Samuel Pepys noted in his diary that there were rumours about the Great Fire of London "that there is a plot in it" – either Charles II, Catholic conspirators or European enemies of Britain. "Conspiracy theories are an exercise in connecting dots," Brotherton writes – whether or not those dots are actually related in any way.

Some conspiracy theories are relatively harmless; others are horribly dangerous. Brotherton quotes historian Norman Cohn on the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, "a preposterous fabrication" designed to "appeal to all the paranoid and destructive potentialities in human beings" which became "a warrant for genocide". It's scary that if you follow the links on many websites about other conspiracies – 9/11, Diana, JFK, "chemtrails" – you can still be led to *Protocols*-believing sites even today. Dangerous in a different way are parents who, for whatever misguided reasons, refuse to have their children vaccinated, and are putting not only their own children at risk but also other un-vaccinated people, both children and adults. He cites infectious disease specialist Paul Offit that the concerns about MMR are about as plausible as early 19th-century claims "that the smallpox vaccine caused recipients to sprout horns, run about on all fours, and low and squint like cows".

Apart from these and a few others, Brotherton doesn't spend much time pointing out the scientific, historical and logical fallacies in conspiracy theories. Instead he looks at what makes people believe them. He studied the psychology of conspiracy theorists for his PhD, but this is no dry rewrite of a doctoral thesis. It's a thoroughly detailed study, but it's a fun read, packed full of interesting details. I'm indebted to Brotherton for giving me the origin of the famous tin-foil hat – it's from a 1927 short story by Julian Huxley, brother of Aldous.

The conspiracist worldview, he says, "paints the world in black and white". Conspiracy theorists believe they are being misled: "appearances mislead, and nothing is quite as it seems". He quotes political commentator Daniel Pipes, that conspiracy theorists seem to have "startling faith in the capabilities of their enemies" in hoodwinking the world, with no one spilling the beans. The lack of any evidence to support their theories "just means the conspiracy is working". Attempting to refute a conspiracy theory, Brotherton laments, "is like nailing jelly to a wall. Since conspiracy theories are inherently unproven, the theory is always a work in progress, able to dodge refutation by inventing new twists and turns... Conspiracy theories aren't just immune to refutation – they thrive on it. If it looks like a conspiracy, it was a conspiracy. If it doesn't look like a conspiracy, it was definitely a conspiracy. Evidence against the conspiracy theory becomes evidence of conspiracy.

Heads I win, tails you lose."

> **"Crazy people may be wrong in their beliefs, but they are no more crazy than you and me"**

Believers in one conspiracy theory are far more likely to believe in other conspiracy theories, he says, even entirely unrelated ones; "once you buy into one theory, it opens the door to all the others". And conspiracists are able to accept contradictory theories – basically, anything is more believable to them than the official story. So when asked if Bin Laden was killed by the US military in May 2011, or if he had died years before, or if he was still alive, they would happily go for both of the last two – "some kind of Schrödinger's terrorist, alive and dead at the same time".

But conspiracists aren't "hopelessly paranoid loons", Brotherton says. Leaping to wrong conclusions is something we all do; so is believing something in the face of all evidence. Psychological testing shows that conspiracy theorists do tend to be less trusting and more angry; they are less satisfied with life, more discontented and feel themselves powerless. With a fear of lack of control, of happenstance, of randomness, they seem to want someone to be in charge, even if it's a faceless power they see as their enemy. But they're not all weird people out on the fringes; apparently between 10 and 30 per cent of people believe in some form of conspiracy theory – or far more if you count those who have some doubts about the official story on JFK.

There is a correlation between believers in conspiracy theories and believers in pseudoscience and alternative medicine, supernatural beliefs, astrology, superstitions and urban legends. So although Brotherton stresses the similarities rather than the differences, it does seem clear that conspiracists are more credulous than most of us, and less inclined to think logically, rationally and scientifically. Indeed, he points out that if mainstream sources of information are part of the conspiracy, "then the very fact

Continued on page 62

The really big mystery

There have been over 1,000 documented reports of giant skeletons in the US alone... but were they just an inbred elite?

GIANTS
ON RECORD
JIM VIEIRA
HUGH NEWMAN

Giants on Record

America's Hidden History, Secrets in the Mounds and the Smithsonian Files

Jim Vieira & Hugh Newman

Avalon Rising 2015

Pb, 396pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780956786517

FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

The giant is a flexible trope in our cultural vocabulary: the biblical version is an angel fallen to Earth, the mythological Titan a monster bridging the human and the divine; the fairy tale version is a gross exaggeration of what it means to be both human and superior, a caricature of our dominion over the Earth. More importantly, the cultural giant serves as an inadvertent barrier to understanding something of our own – and very real – ancient past.

That barrier has, I think, been dealt an effective hammer blow by Vieira and Newman is this splendid book. The first and most useful thing they have done is to shrink the giant to a scale that makes it possible for us to accommodate giants into the real world, albeit a real world that belongs to the past. We are not presented with 50ft (15m) colossi crushing mere humanity like insects. Instead, we are offered a race, or an elite section of our own race: tall, of course (people who averaged around 7ft (2m) in height, but could be both taller and, importantly, shorter); but formed in proportion, and largely possessed of the same faculties and capacities as ourselves, though in larger doses.

Hugh Newman is well known to British followers of the ancient mysteries circuit; Jim Vieira is newer to the scene. Vieira, a stonemason with a longstanding passion for the amazing megalithic culture of the Americas (a subject that has received less attention than it deserves) discovered that many of the sites he investigated had generated reports of giant skeletons, and often outsized artefacts to go with them. He began to include these giants in his investigations, and soon realised that he was dealing with an astonishingly widespread phenomenon. There are, in fact, well over 1,000 documented reports of giant skeletons on record in the United States alone. They are reported to range in size from merely large (from six and a half to seven feet in height) to truly giant (from eight to 10 feet tall and sometimes beyond); all are in proportion in most respects, though quite a few seem to have had slightly outsize skulls relative to body size. Perhaps the most surprising thing about these reports, which come from the earliest explorers and settlers of the Americas right up until recent times (many come from the early to mid-20th century) is that they include – at least, in the early days – encounters with live giants.

Professional and amateur archæologists can make mistakes, and there are enough examples of fraudulent claims in the literature to make us cautious. But it's hard to imagine that several thousand people, in an age without the Internet's capacity for distributing falsehood and fantasy, could have conspired and contrived to create a hoax of such – erm – giant proportions. Either there really were giants, or a very large number of people were deluded into thinking so, independently of each other and over and over again.

The American examples include an extra feature, documented in a large number of finds, which makes the hoax theory even less likely: hyperdontia, or supernumerary teeth. This feature, and the fact that it is not universal among the discoveries, leads to the likelihood that we are dealing here, not with a different species of humanity, but rather with an elite that was relatively inbred. Unless, of course, several hundred archæologists came up independently with a dental joke, or somehow managed to communicate the scam across thousands of miles and decades without the aid of electronic transfer.

So where are these skeletons now? Well, thereby hangs another tale. The Smithsonian Institute took possession of a huge number of skeletons during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and somehow contrived to lose them all. In some cases, this was not such a surprise; many of the skeletons were in a poor state of preservation – many disintegrated within hours of their disinterment. But it is still a tad disappointing that no examples survived the cleansing zeal of the Smithsonian's own elite. No surprise then, that many people infer a conspiracy to cover up anomalous and uncomfortable evidence, particularly when many of the outsize artefacts, rather better preserved, also managed to disappear.

Like many books of its kind (Cremo and Thompson's *Forbidden Archæology* is an especially irritating example), this book is less a good consecutive read and more a slightly repetitive directory of discoveries. But it's an exciting directory, and it opens a fascinating – and potentially paradigm-busting – door to the ancient and not-so-ancient past.

Noel Rooney

Fortean Times Verdict

SLIGHTLY REPETITIOUS IN PLACES BUT FASCINATING NONETHELESS **8**

Continued from previous page

that an idea has been rejected by scientists, academia or the media can be taken as evidence of its validity". And this ends up meaning that "conspiracy theories turn the cultic milieu into the only source of trustworthy knowledge".

And that's the problem that always faces sensible forteans when arguing against a conspiracist: they will point to online material "proving" their case, but if you try to show them sound scientific evidence against their beliefs, they'll dismiss it out of hand as being part of the conspiracy.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict

CONSPIRACISTS ARE LIKE US – JUST MORE CREDULOUS AND BLINKERED **9**

Failure

Why Science is So Successful

Stuart Firestein

Oxford University Press 2016

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FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £12.99

FAILURE
STUART FIRESTEIN

"If science teaches us anything," Frederick Frankenstein commented, "it teaches us to accept our failures, as well as our successes, with quiet dignity and grace". You know what happens next. (If you don't watch *Young Frankenstein*). Frederick's reaction will resonate with anyone who has spent time in research.

Yet in this engaging book, Firestein argues that scientists really should embrace their failures, as well as their successes. Failure can leave a residue of "ideas, questions, paradoxes, enigmas, contradictions" that's the lifeblood of science. As science is never definitive, scientists move "from failure to failure, happy with the interim results because they work so well and often are pretty close to the real thing".

Firestein is, according to his biography, "dedicated to promoting science to a public audience". And he does an admirable job. His colloquial style – full of phrases such as "How amazing is that?" "Silly, you think?", "Does it seem to you, as it does to me, that the whole thing is a bit of a crapshoot?" – is easy to read, reminding me of a popular podcast.

Firestein eloquently describes why the public needs to appreciate that the scientific method "is a process and not a pile of facts". Scientists should welcome and communicate the inherent "doubt, uncertainty, ignorance, and failure". The public should stop looking for certainties that don't exist. His book is an important first step. Even for professional biologists (which just about encompasses me), Firestein can be insightful, such as when he tackles the counterproductive and often acrimonious debate between two schools of behavioural biology: Skinnerians and ethologists.

The book is, I suspect, intentionally 'top line' and he effectively communicates principles rather than getting bogged down in details. In general, the approach works for a popular science book. In places, however, I felt the line lay a tad too close to the top.

For example, Firestein remarks that "much of Soviet science was distorted beyond recognition in the supposed service of the people". That's certainly true of Lysenkoism – a tragic variation on Lamarckian genetics that undermined Soviet agriculture – which he succulently and eloquently dismisses. But pioneering work on Cherenkov radiation, lasers and masers, and low-temperature physics led to Nobel prizes for Soviet scientists in 1958, 1964 and 1978 respectively.

And that's just physics.

What about Sputnik 1, Vostock 1 and Mir? I guess it depends on how you define 'much'. In such cases, it's hard to judge the veracity of Firestein's arguments without a little more supporting evidence.

These are, however, quibbles. *Failure* is recommended for those who'd like to see what really goes on behind laboratory doors and engage in informed discussions about science.

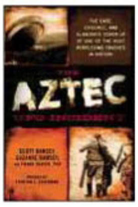
Mark Greener

Fortean Times Verdict

A FAILURE THAT ISN'T – GOOD POPULAR SCIENCE WRITING **8**

The case ain't proven

Despite the book's subtitle, there's a lack of evidence of any cover-up, and witness testimony is insufficiently probed



The Aztec UFO Incident

The Case, Evidence, and Elaborate Cover-Up of One of the Most Perplexing Crashes in History

Scott Ramsey, Suzanne Ramsey and Frank Thayer

New Page Books 2015
Pb, 320pp, illus, notes, ind, £15.99, ISBN 9781632650016
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £13.99

The Aztec incident occurred on 25 March 1948, when a disc-shaped metallic craft apparently made a touchdown on Hart Canyon Mesa, near Aztec, New Mexico. Before the military turned up to take it away, as many as 16 local people got a look at the craft that contained dead humanoid bodies.

On 8 March 1950, Silas Mason Newton famously lectured the University of Denver about this and other crashed saucer stories. The lecture was organised by Denver radio station salesman George Koehler, who was tracked down by Special Agent Hanson and Special Agent Unger of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (AFOSI).

Koehler secretly recorded his interview with the agents, and it reveals he is as evasive as a bag of snakes. He obviously knows nothing about UFOs, and you have to feel sorry for the AFOSI agents who patiently deal with his belief that they are hiding the reality of the UFO invasion from the public.

Frank Scully's book *Behind the Flying Saucers,* published in 1950, contains more about Newton's claims that came from a Dr Gee (an alias for Leo GeBauer and/ or a group of scientists). Scully met with 'Dr Gee' who showed him a radio component and some gears that were recovered from the craft. He even showed film footage of the UFO that – for reasons of security – needed a special chemical to make it viewable for an hour, before the images faded away. (No, I don't believe it either…) Needless to say, these items haven't been found.

A valuable aspect of this book is that it documents the feud between Scully and John P Cahn, who wrote for the *San Francisco Chronicle.* John wanted to buy the story for the newspaper and when Scully refused, Cahn made an all-out effort to discredit the story.

The authors allege that it was Cahn who got the FBI to investigate the business dealings of oil man Newton, who was brought to court in 1953 and found guilty of fraud. This has since tainted the Aztec story, though here it is quickly pointed out that Newton was not fined or imprisoned, although he did have to pay a massive $18,000 in court costs.

As evidence of a sting operation, the authors note that on 30 September 1950 the Army CID and FBI tried intercepting the sale of photographs of the Aztec flying saucer at a bar in Denver, Colorado. Again, no photographs materialised and this was possibly an attempt by someone to make a quick buck.

One chapter goes into detail about how the flying saucer was so quickly recovered, and they even plot a possible route a flatbed truck would take to carry this 100ft (30m) diameter craft. They also speculate about who might be the scientists collectively known as Dr Gee, and they note that there is a mysterious concrete slab near the landing spot and numerous dead trees in the area.

What they don't mention is that the *Aztec Independent Review* newspaper printed in 1948 a prank story about little green men from Venus crashing in a saucer. And they don't even mention that the Aztec saucer was revived in the fabricated Aquarius document produced by the AFOSI in the early 1980s.

Harder to explain are the eyewitness testimonies made decades after the event. One oil worker, Doug Noland, recalls climbing on top the craft that had no signs of rivets, seams or weld marks on its highly polished surface. He and his mate also peeked through a porthole where they saw two small bodies slumped over a control panel. The testimony of a police officer and a preacher also back up this story.

In this book there is just not enough interrogation of the validity of the witness testimony or the stories of a recovery of a 'flying saucer'. Instead, there is plenty of waffle about feuds and cover-ups.

In the end, this does not contain proof of a flying saucer recovery event.

Nigel Watson

Fortean Times Verdict

AS (IN)CREDIBLE & CONVINCING AS THE ROSWELL INCIDENT **6**

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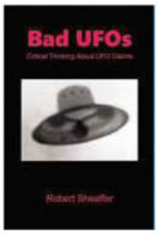
Skeptical to the Max!

An often hilarious brick-by-brick dismantling of the wilder edges of ufology is achieved with commendable good humour



Bad UFOs

Critical Thinking About UFO Claims

Robert Sheaffer

CreateSpace 2016
Pb, 271pp; refs, ind, $18.95/£12.95, ISBN 9781519260840
AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON

One of the simpler pleasures one takes from reading Robert Sheaffer's commentaries on ufology is the sustained moderate tone with which he disposes of the claims of ufology.

Sheaffer's motto is "Skeptical to the Max!", and one might be led to expect, from the sometimes unseemly contumely that is poured upon his head by both True Believers and by so-called 'serious' ufologists, that his promulgations were as foam-flecked as some of his critics'. In fact, he generally prefers to eschew comment and let the logical and factual holes in UFO promoters' claims speak for themselves. About the most caustic remark in his new book is *à propos* Mexican showman Jaime Maussan's 'analysis' of a UFO video taken using infra-red filters in 2004.

Maussan's website maintains, we're told, that "the 'halos' seen surrounding the objects is [sic] evidence of a powerful 'magnetic field'. It goes on to discourse knowingly about the objects' 'frequency' and 'vortex', as well as their supposed violation of 'entropy', all of which is complete pseudo-scientific balderdash." This is a good deal more kindly put than it could have been: Maussan's "discourse" doesn't even rise to the level of the pseudo-scientific: it's just crap, and shameless crap at that, calculated to appeal to the half-educated. To prove the point, the 'UFOs' videoed were eventually identified as flares from Mexico's biggest offshore oilfield.

More typical of Sheaffer's debunking style is this: "When Greer [leader of CSETI, a major player in the 'disclosure' movement] moved… to Charlottesville, Virginia, alien activity followed closely in his wake [and a local paper reported] 'Greer had just bought a house… when the circles appeared there.'

Greer noted that the crop circles were in the shape of the CSETI logo. 'It was a welcome mat they – the extraterrestrials – put out for the director of CSETI," he modestly explained." And that's really all you have to say, isn't it? Just report the facts, to make the point, or even, as here, several at once.

Sheaffer's main target, inevitably, is the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH). He kicks off with a rather wry survey of 70 (well, nearly) years' worth of ufological non-productivity, and then proceeds, chapter by chapter, to give his straight-faced but often comic take on the whole cyclorama of alleged evidence for the ETH: photos, crashes, abductions, conspiracy, disclosure, the possibility of interstellar travel, and quietly unpicks the lot.

His funniest, laugh-out-loud chapter is 'Cosmic Doomsdays', which catalogues the astonishing number of occasions since 1997 on which, we were assured, the world was going to end, and ET was implicated with striking frequency. One had no idea! And here the world still is, as ruinous, ramshackle and glorious as ever. So it goes.

Sheaffer misses a few points. He maintains a sweet innocent face describing how some parties in the 'disclosure' movement are convinced the US government is covering up the 'fact' that UFOs utilise free energy – never mind how they know this, you at the back – to protect the profits of Big Oil and the auto industry.

He may have pointed out that if the US had a monopoly on free energy generation, it would be mad to keep it secret: the world would be falling over itself to buy the technology, along with Cadillacs and Mack trucks and even more Boeing airliners. The Green lobby would be out of a job, but Big Oil would hardly be out of business.

He doesn't see the 2000 Encounters at Indian Head symposium in quite the same light as I do (quaffing pleasures excepted), but it would be tedious to elaborate. He doesn't pick up on Clifford Stone's claim to have been packed off into the jungle during the Vietnam War to "recover [sic] a downed B-52 that looked as if it had simply been 'plucked from the sky and set down in the jungle' by a UFO." This is William S English's long-ago debunked yarn (**FT75:21-27, 76:30-35**), which Stone has shamelessly appropriated.

The black and white illustrations are sometimes a bit grim, lacking detail and contrast, although this is more an artefact of the publisher's production process than the fault of the author. And the bibliography is just a bit skimpy.

Nit-picking aside, this is a book worth having, whatever your take on UFOs.

Proponents should suppress their shudders and read it, as it's highly informative, and demonstrates that debunkers are not nasty, noisy or negative – just not impressed – while sceptics will be royally entertained.

Peter Brookesmith

Fortean Times Verdict

DEADPAN COMEDY EXPOSES UFOLOGY'S LUNATIC FRINGE **9**

Swarm Troopers

How Small Drones Will Conquer the World

David Hambling

Archangel Ink 2015
Pb, 310pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781942761747
FORTEAN TIMES BOOKSHOP PRICE £9.49

Small, smart drones combining the miniaturised technology of mobile phones with biomimetics – copying the way birds and insects fly, think and behave – are seeing an increasing number of civilian and military applications. In the latter sphere, a drone operating alone is little more than a high-tech spy camera. The future lies with swarms. Thousands of low-cost drones, armed with small explosive charges and working cooperatively, could flatten a city with the precision of a controlled demolition.

Because they're cheap and simple, drones have the potential to democratise warfare. In 2012, a 26-year-old ex-drummer decided to attack various buildings in Washington DC with radio-controlled model planes packed with explosive. He was caught before he could go through with it, but anyone with a grudge could do the same thing.

David Hambling writes a regular science column for *Fortean Times*, and while *Swarm Troopers* isn't a fortean book, it certainly qualifies as weird science. Aimed at non-specialist readers, it starts with a wide-ranging history of drones in warfare before moving on to a discussion of the current state of the art and possible future developments.

There were a few things I found frustrating about the book, such as the lack of an index, the use of non-standard measurement units and an almost complete absence of illustrations. I had to keep putting the book down to do a Google image search to visualise what he was talking about! All in all, though, it's a first-rate non-technical overview of a rather frightening subject.

Andrew May

Fortean Times Verdict

NOT EXACTLY FORTEAN, BUT WEIRD SCIENCE AND TERRIFYING WITH IT **9**

ALSO RECEIVED

We leaf through a small selection of the dozens of books that have arrived at Fortean Towers in recent months...

In Search of Lake Monsters

Peter Costello

Anomalist Books 2015

Pb, 355pp, illus, bib, ind, ISBN 9781938398322

In Search of Lake Monsters was first published in 1974 by the late Garnstone Press. This was just after *FT* was founded and the same publisher was stoking underground and alternative excitement with John Michell's *View over Atlantis* (1972), Alfred Watkins' *Old Straight Track* (reprint of 1925 edition), Andrew Green's *Haunted Kingdom* (1973) and the Bords' *Mysterious Britain* (1972).

In his introduction to this welcome reprint, Loren Coleman notes that about that time there was a "wasteland" of books on cryptozoology – the last notable lights in this darkness being Heuvelmans's *On the Track of Unknown Animals* and several by Ivan Sanderson – so Costello's work shone out like a beacon. Written in Costello's late 20s, it was a masterclass in erudition and research, underpinning the classical and cultural evidence for many different kinds of water monsters – or, we should say, unknown animals – all over the world, from *Skrimsl, soe-orms* and *pookas* to *waitoreke*, *bunyips* and dragons.

Costello worked closely with Heuvelmans and in his original preface the latter paid tribute to Costello's coverage of Nessie and other lake monsters at a time when Heuvelmans himself was engaged on research into other projects. Here it is, in full detail with some expansion, concluding with Heuvelmans's endorsed long-necked seal theory.

Many of today's cryptozoologists had their interest fired up by this book, and this edition deserves to be offered to new generations of would-be forteans and monster-hunters.

We look forward to the reissue of Costello's other cryptozoological studies: *The Magic Zoo: A Natural History of Fabulous Animals* (1979), and the long-promised *Beasts Beyond Belief: Strange Creatures of Celtic Seas and Waters*.

Delusions in Science and Spirituality

The Fall and Rise of the Standard Model and the Rise of Knowledge from Unseen Worlds

Susan B Martinez

Bear & Co 2015

Pb, 436pp, bib, ind, $20.00, ISBN 9781591431985

Susan Martinez – an anthropologist and linguist with an interest in fringe religious and spiritual movements – boldly challenges contemporary orthodoxy with her subtitle: 'The Fall and Rise of the Standard Model and the Rise of Knowledge from Unseen Worlds'.

In great detail she attempts nothing less than to show how most of what we know and are taught "is 100% wrong", and that most of the pronouncements from orthodox sources (eg, science and government) are skewed by double-talk and political correctness.

It is contentious throughout and, as many of her targets are ones we also monitor, it is a book that deserves to be read closely by all forteans interested in the philosophy of science, 'reality' and eschatology.

Paranormal Petersburg

Pamela K Kennedy

Schiffer Publishing 2015

Pb, 206pp, illus, bib, ind, $16.99, ISBN 978076434942

The author has written other books on haunted areas in Virginia, especially the 'Tri-cities' area.

She uses all sorts of electronic equipment to record sounds and 'white noise' and then (somehow) resolves them into answers to questions she asks while wandering around haunted areas. She has appeared on the AVA Produced TV show *Paranormal World Seekers*, and the book is cast in the style of this very modern media genre (i.e., it takes a lot for granted, such as that places are haunted by spirits of the dead and that you will believe everything she claims).

As a guide for credulous tourists it is nicely presented with colour images, but a useful reference it is not.

Lightning

Nature and Culture

Derek M Elsom

Reaktion Books 2015

Pb, 240pp, illus, refs, bib, ind, £14.95, ISBN 9781780234960

One of a series of books on natural phenomena that traces a history of the topic through cultural superstitions, scientific discoveries, and depictions in literature and the arts, illustrated by beautiful colour photography.

From odd warding customs, the gods of antiquity and ball lightning to lighting marks, St Elmo's Fire and solidified lightning (fulgurites), Derek Elsom – an emeritus professor of geography at Oxford Brookes University – maintains our interest throughout, making this very accessible to everyman.

It is odd that the book does not reference Frank Lane's study of the violence of lightning, *The Elements Rage*; nevertheless this makes an excellent introduction for curious young minds to one of the mysterious forces of nature.

The Reincarnation of Giordano Bruno

Terry Emm

The Memory Palace 2016

Pb, 105pp, illus, £11.98, ISBN 9781516825899

A curiously intriguing book that claims to be the account of a musician (the author) who, in 2011 decided to undergo hypnotic memory regression. Gradually through internal experiences which seemed to be memories of another (but the same!) self, he has come to believe he is an incarnation of Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), the Italian friar, mathematician and astrologer; and the Chinese artist and poet Lu Ji (261–303).

Certainly, his photo looks very like a portrait of Bruno. Emm's motive seems to be to put his experiences on record; whether it provides any proof of reincarnation is impossible to say.

Our Holographic World

Anthony Milne

Empiricus Books 2014

Pb, 326pp, notes, ind, £10.95, ISBN 9781857568271

Milne has spent most of his life fascinated by the mysteries of time and 'reality'; or, as he puts it, "people's unusual time and dream experiences and the mystery of coincidences" which he endeavours here to "integrate into a mainstream scientific frame of reference".

The conclusion he presents is that 'reality' behaves like a hologram; and that phenomena often judged paranormal, may actually be a misperception of something quite natural but beyond the scope (or interest) of orthodox scientists to explain.

Nothing new in this hypothesis, but it's always interesting to see another theorist's selection of evidence and data and Milne explains with patience and clarity.

Crap Taxidermy

Kat Su

Cassell Illustrated 2015

Hb, 95pp, illus, £7.99, ISBN 9781844038039

This book does what it says on the tin: it provides examples of bad taxidermy and what the author describes as "weird-as-hell good taxidermy" and "weird-as-hell bad taxidermy", plus a helpful final chapter on how to stuff a mouse, should you have a dead rodent lying about the place and a spare two hours. We've run many pics of sports of nature over the years, but some of the images here are fairly startling – knowledge of anatomy is not much in evidence. Some of the wolpertingers, ratipedes and other inventions will be familiar, as will the Walter Potter-esque tableaux. It's a perfect loo book for the less squeamish reader.

SEND REVIEW COPIES OF DVDS, BLU-RAYS AND GAMES TO:
FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD.

The Passing

Dir Gareth Bryn, Wales 2015

On UK release from 8 April

Set in a remote area of rain-sodden Wales, *The Passing* (*Yr Ymadawiad*), directed by Pontypridd-born Gareth Bryn, is as Welsh as they come. Its three characters speak in the beautifully soft and lilting Welsh tongue throughout and it has a plot that hints at an unhappy incident in the history of the country – which I can't reveal, because that would be giving the game away. It's a film that can't easily be pigeonholed, but sits somewhere between horror and melodrama with a bit of psychological thriller thrown in.

Stanley, played by the charismatic Mark Lewis Jones (he's been in everything from *Stella* to *Atlantis* to *Being Human*), lives in a farmhouse cut off from the modern world. Living a solitary life, he occupies his day building a well and looking after his chickens, eating what he's able to catch, scavenge and raise himself. Sara and Iwan are a young couple who crash their car into a river and are helped out by the mysterious Stanley.

Sara is injured in the crash and they stay with Stanley for longer than one would expect, despite Iwan's suspicions of the older man's intentions and even though their car has been pulled from the ravine. Why? And why does the relationship between Stanley and Sara become close? And what's the reason behind Iwan's tantrums and growing cruelty towards Stanley?

The mystery builds nicely throughout the film in a languorous way that probably won't please fans of action-packed gore fests. This is a film that knows when to take its time. The opening scenes show Stanley's day-to-day life in his old, sparsely decorated cottage, tending to his chickens, making his muddy well and eating his morning egg in a house that hasn't changed since the 1930s; these sequences alone last at least five minutes, and are all the better for it.

The darkness builds just as effectively. As well as growing tensions between the characters and a dread of what the outcome will be, *The Passing* is shot without conventional film lighting in a way that makes full use of the gorgeous Welsh greenery while allowing plenty of dark shadows in the interior and exterior to creep in. The claustrophobic, rain-soaked atmosphere is heightened by an unusual soundtrack that features a form of Pembrokeshire congregational singing called *Canu Pwnc* – weird, haunting and helping to establish the tone of the piece.

Unfortunately, I can't give any more details about the plot without spoiling it. But this small film with great dialogue (from a screenplay by Ed Talfan, one of the writers of *Hinterland*), great acting (Mark Lewis Jones is mesmerising) and an expertly built mystery is a treat.
Julie McNamee

Fortean Times Verdict
POWERFUL AND HAUNTING WELSH PSYCHODRAMA **8**

The Brand New Testament

Dir Jaco van Dormael, Belgium 2015

On UK release from 15 April

True to his Belgian roots, director Jaco van Doemael – best known for *Toto the Hero* – delivers a slice of surreal cinema that comes on like a mash-up of *Amélie* and *Brazil*.

In *The Brand New Testament*, God, a vindictive and bad tempered boor, lives in Brussels where he rules the world from a secret room in a small, dingy flat. He amuses hismelf – day in, day out – by meting out punishments to the humans he's created. But his daughter discovers his cruelty and in an act of teenage rebellion sends every human on Earth the date of their deaths, just to spite him. The consequences of this act are handled with poetry and invention. Benoît Poelvoorde (best known for his unforgettable role in *Man Bites Dog*) is especially brilliant as the cranky God character, while each of the Apostles brings a different human dimension to the story. Catherine Deneuve nearly steals the show with her bedroom romp with a gorilla, but it's the wealth of ideas, complemented by a healthy dose of sardonic humour, that makes *The Brand New Testament* a worthy, if somewhat iconoclastic, addition to the biblical canon.
Etienne Gilfillan

Fortean Times Verdict
A GRUMPY GOD MAKES FOR A SURREAL CINEMATIC GEM **8**

The Enfield Haunting

Dir Kristoffer Nyholm, UK 2015

Entertainment One, £9.99 (DVD)

The Enfield Haunting is a three-part TV drama aired on Sky Living in May 2015, and now released on DVD, telling the story of the famous poltergeist case of the late 1970s. It's based on Guy Lyon Playfair's book *This House is Haunted*; Playfair had been involved in the case as a member of the Society of Psychical Research, and is played here quite unsympathetically by Matthew Macfadyen.

The real stars of the mini-series are Timothy Spall as Maurice Grosse, another SPR investigator struggling to come to terms with the death of his own daughter, and Eleanor Worthington Cox as 11-year-old Janet, the main focus of the poltergeist.

The drama handles the many ambiguities of the story well. Were Janet and her sister faking or not? Did the investigators see what they expected to see, rather than what actually happened? Grosse is too credulous by far, yet his sympathetic approach, superbly and sadly portrayed by Spall, seems to help more than hinder. Playfair is portrayed as young, arrogant and know-it-all. The other SPR investigators who come on the scene are sceptical and dismissive, and manage to persuade Janet to own up to faking the poltergeist manifestations – a confession she later retracts to Grosse and Playfair.

Whatever the truth of the original incident, which continued for two years and had considerable publicity in the *Daily Mail* and the *Mirror*, the TV version is compelling and at times genuinely scary – and made even more so by the ordinariness of both the setting and the characters (Rosie Cavaliero excels as the somewhat drab mother who keeps going despite everything). The poltergeist effects are skilfully done; one of several excellent extras on the DVD explains how some of them were filmed.

David V Barrett

Fortean Times Verdict
CLASSIC FORTEAN CASE, SUPERBLY DRAMATISED **9**

Harry Price – Ghosthunter

Dir Alex Pillai, UK 2015
Spirit Entertainment Ltd, £9.99 (DVD)

Rafe Spall is the eponymous star of ITV's *Harry Price – Ghost Hunter*, loosely based on Neil Spring's 2013 novel *The Ghosthunters*. A few elements of Spring's novel remain, notably his feisty, irreverent, intelligent Sarah Grey, critical foil to Spall's Price, who is evidently attracted to her. Indeed, his desire to impress Miss Grey results in Price publicly denouncing a medium from the performer's own stage, demonstrating his act to be little more than one of cold reading. The twist here is that, after Price's expulsion from the theatre, the stage medium proceeds to tell Price something of his own past, using apparently psychic powers. Thus we learn that Price is carrying burdens of guilt and loss, his wife having been committed to a lunatic asylum, and his fake séances resulting in the suicide of a young soldier.

By contrast, the historical Price's wife Constance, far from dying in an asylum, outlived him by nearly three decades. And, whilst something of a rogue, the real Price did not organise his own fraudulent séances, but quite the reverse – he exposed those of others [see **FT338:16-18**].

ITV's Price is drawn to appeal to a modern audience, his unprejudiced and liberal-minded nature signalled by a close friendship with Black 'witch doctor' Albert Ogoro. (In fact, unpublished letters written by the real Price display an unattractive anti-Semitism; all the more distasteful, given his repeated attempts to house his library at a German university during the Nazi era, with trips to Germany as late as July 1939).

Ogoro (based on Rollo Ahmed?) is shown performing a meaningless 'mumbo-jumbo' ritual. But

THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com; @revpeterlaws)

AMERICAN HORROR PROJECT, VOL 1

Dir Matt Climber, Christopher Speeth, Robert Allan Schnitzer Cooper, US 1973-76
Arrow Video, £39.99 (Dual format)

Stephen Thrower is as an author and journalist, but his job title should really be 'horror archæologist', because digging up precious relics is what he does. He's a goateed Dr Jones, blowing dust off ultra-rare forgotten films, and this month he brings three quirky artefacts to light: a trio of 1970s cult flicks so obscure that many fans won't even recognise their titles, let alone have seen the films themselves.

Malatesta's Carnival of Blood (1973) is perhaps the least well known. Members of a family take jobs at a fairground, hoping they might find their missing son in the process. Instead, they meet a horde of carnival ghouls who devour living flesh in the vaults of the fair. Yes, it's schlocky. Yes, the budget's cheap as ye olde chips. But none of this stops it from being a sumptuous, left-field nightmare. On paper it sounds like comedy – parody, even: see zombie hippy monsters sing three-part harmony while dragging their victims into cotton candy dungeons! Yet the dread remains. I'm a sucker for 1970s style, anyway, so the film had me with its lingering shots of fat families struggling to get into bobbing Tunnel of Love boats. But when night falls and the swivel-eyed ghouls crawl from the shadows, it's surprisingly tense and inventive.

The gears really shift for *The Witch Who Came from the Sea* (1976), which plays like Polanski's *Repulsion* relocated to the American seaside. Here, Molly Perkins is the kindly aunt whose mind we get to see crack apart. It's a subversive, disturbing story that stayed with me for days; it still does, actually. Put it this way: there are images from this film I'd like to un-see. That's not intended as a criticism, and I'm not referring to gore or violence. It's just that horror is often at its most potent when it shines a light on the complex terrors of domestic life. What I loved about the film is its refusal to be simple. It's not quick to paint characters as either good or bad. The titular 'witch' even seems to forgive the one who hurt her in the past, which seems inexplicable. Yet here I was, as an audience member, doing the exact same thing in my sympathy for *her* and her terrible acts. There's a powerful lesson about so-called human 'evil' here. Namely that 'morality' can be very, very complicated.

Finally, we get *The Premonition* (1976), a supernatural thriller with the sort of one-line poster-ready premise studios execs adore. What if the parent of your adopted daughter turned up, wanting her back? It could have been just a tense family drama, but it turns all spooky when the adoptive mother starts having strange visions. Is she going mad or is she getting genuine psychic insights into the lives of others? I guess this is the weakest of the bunch, and it's undeniably a slow starter; but then, halfway through, I suddenly realised I was gripped. ESP, family breakdown – the film is a time capsule of 1970s concerns. But, then, all three of these films are powerful windows onto that decade.

They really don't make 'em like this anymore. All the more reason to celebrate the folks who dig these grisly treasures up. The excellent dual-format package includes plenty of fascinating extras as well as a 60-page booklet of notes by Kim Newman.

Volume two soon, please!

Fortean Times Verdict
RARE HORROR RELICS UNEARTHED AND RESTORED **9**

what harm is there, he argues, if this helps his clients – a childless couple – to conceive? An observation as to the importance of suggestion in exhibitions of the paranormal. It's been argued that trickery is a necessary element in unorthodox medical therapies, like those of Brazilian 'psychic surgeons'; is it the placebo effect in operation, or something more? Is some form of stage conjuring an essential preliminary, in order that the audience falls into the correct receptive frame of mind, before genuine supernatural phenomena begin to manifest?

The screenplay suffers from occasionally anachronistic dialogue. One example: Vernon Wall, the shifty journalist, quizzing Sarah Grey and asking to be "brought up to speed" with Harry's doings. However, in an allusion to today's untrustworthy politicians, the plausible, ambitious MP Edward Goodwin uses the phrase "we're all in this together" whilst out canvassing. Rather than being jarringly out of place, this serves as useful shorthand for Goodwin being a villainous, duplicitous character.

Goodwin's palatial home is more Downton Abbey than Borley Rectory. Oddly, for such a grand mansion, we are told that it was once a workhouse. The apparition of a child (perhaps a nod to the real Price's Rosalie?) neatly combines Goodwin's wife Grace's own prematurely dead son James, and one of the orphan boys, murdered some decades earlier.

Disturbed, unstable Grace (admirably played by *Downton* alumna Zoe Boyle) is loosely based on Borley's Marianne Foyster. The difference here is that Grace's mental instability has been induced by her dastardly husband, who secretly administered barbiturates to make her compliant, the sudden withdrawal of which results in sleepwalking, hallucinations and psychosis. A rational, scientific explanation for the phenomena witnessed in the house – but, as Sarah asks, does it explain all the phenomena? Unfortunately, the screenplay isn't sufficiently nuanced on this point to leave us with much sense of ambiguity.

One accurate element in the programme was Price's love of technology: a Brownie camera with mercury thermometer, a Volta graphophone sound recorder, a galvanometer and a thermograph all put in appearances. But elsewhere in the script, as several SPR members have noted, there's far too much fictionalisation of a genuine historical figure. A pity, given that the real Price's adventures and complicated private life are of sufficient interest in themselves, without the need of any sexing up.

Perhaps one may hope that today's viewers will be less likely to confuse this diffident, likeable 'Harry Price' with his historical counterpart than would a pre-Internet audience of 30 years ago. It may be a forlorn hope, but if people are left curious and eager to learn more about Price and his work, a quick Google will yield lots of factual information.

As a spooky Christmas confection – a ghostbusting Father Brown or Miss Marple with a *Downton* backdrop – I rather enjoyed this fun if frivolous entertainment. But still…
Christopher Josiffe

Fortean Times Verdict
ENTERTAINING ENOUGH, IF LARGELY INACCURATE **6**

Black Cats

Dir Lucio Fulci, Sergio Martino, Italy 1972/1981
Arrow Video, £24.99 (Dual Format)

Two Poe-inspired horrors in one package! First up is *The Black Cat*. Though Lucio Fulci is a director known for gore, sex and general depravity, this entry is as family-friendly as his horror gets. A mad-eyed pensioner, who has clearly lost his eyebrow clippers, battles an evil black cat which is killing locals and defeating death itself. Fans who've overlooked this are missing an atmospheric creeper with a brilliant English village setting. As always, the dashing David Warbeck is great, enigmatic fun, plus there are excellent extras from Stephen Thrower.

Any lack of sleaze from Fulci is more than made up for in the exquisitely titled *Your Vice is a Locked Room and Only I Have the Key*. A cast of horrible characters do horrible things to each to other while horrible things happen to them. Yet it's all so well framed and perfectly pitched that it's difficult not to be drawn in. There's much beauty slinking through the film, but it's the bitter, failed writer that stuck in my mind after the credits rolled. What a git!
Rev Peter Laws

Fortean Times Verdict
A CRACKING DOUBLE BILL OF POE, ITALIAN STYLE **8**

SHORTS

SINISTER 2

Entertainment One, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

The first *Sinister* movie was a decent horror flick that concerned the discovery of home movie footage of entire families being slain, possibly by supernatural forces. It had an unsettling, nightmarish atmosphere and benefitted from a good cast. The sequel runs with the basic idea but lacks everything that made the original work. Shannyn Sossamon plays a single mother who moves to a big old house in the middle of nowhere to escape her abusive ex; one of her young sons (the sensitive one, naturally) starts communing with what may the spirit of a child who died there years before. It's a polished production, which starts well enough, but about 20 minutes in the director decides to opt for the path of least resistance and the film becomes a procession of horror tropes so hackneyed that in the future it could function as a time capsule for the genre. **Daniel King** **5/10**

THE CARRIER

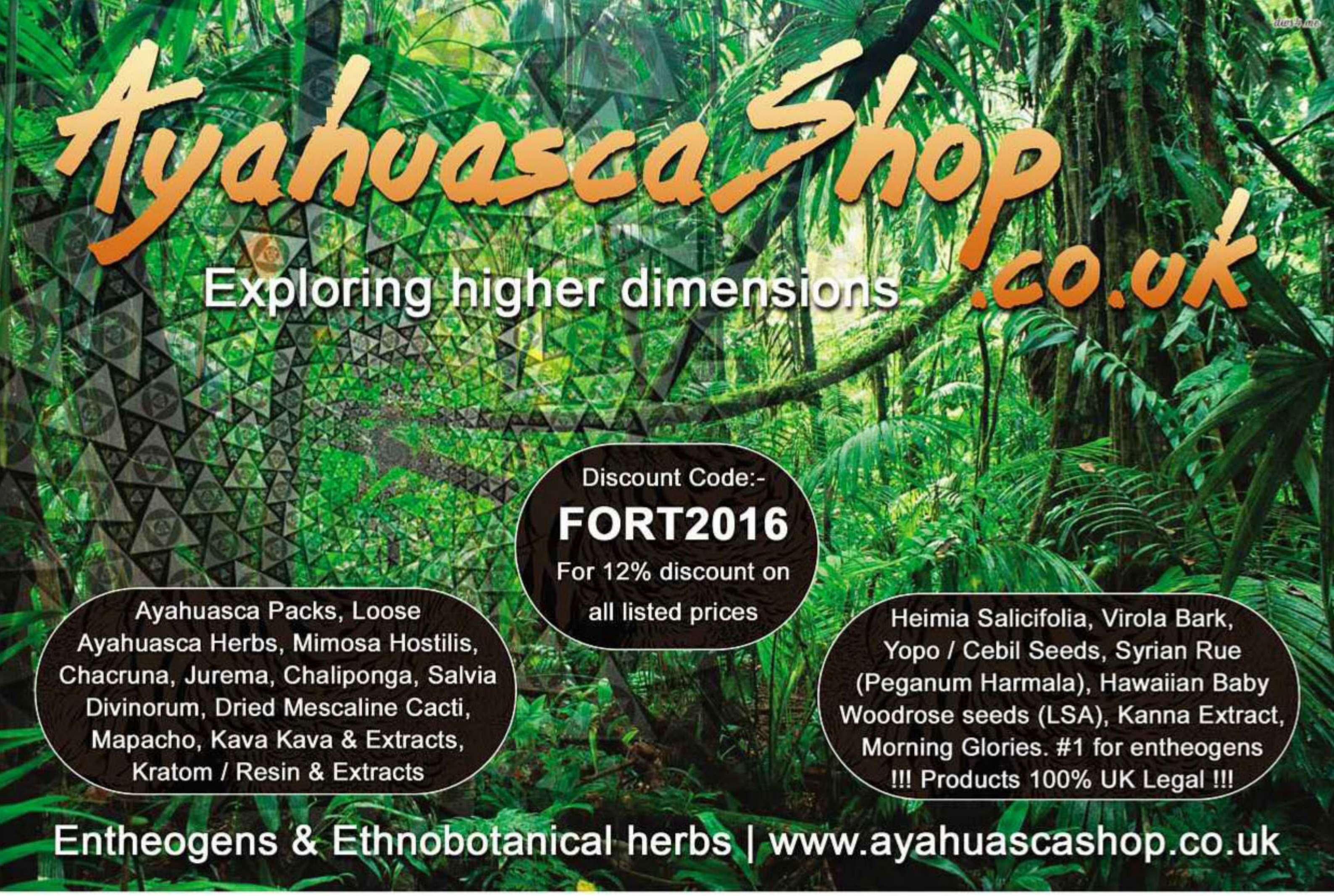
Altitude Film Entertainment, £9.99 (DVD)

A low budget British horror that takes most of the elements from a routine zombie apocalypse flick and puts them on a 747. With most of Europe succumbing to a fatal viral infection (which results in gruesome facial deformities) a few survivors aboard a plane hope to find somewhere disease-free to land; but fuel is low, the passengers are getting twitchy, the co-pilot has disappeared and the infected in Economy keep trying to get an upgrade. Despite a flat script and acting which never really rises above *Doctors* standard, it's perhaps surprisingly watchable. It's tense and gripping, the make-up effects are good and there's always something going on. There's another entry for the Great Improvised Surgery Scenes list and it's all done and dusted in less than 90 minutes. Can't say fairer than that. **DK** **6/10**

CONTRACTED PHASE II

Primal Screen, £7.99 (DVD)

Starting right where the original *Contracted* movie ended, this sequel follows Riley (Matt Mercer), who when we last saw him had just, rather unwisely, had unprotected sex with soon-to-be-zombie Samantha. In fairly short order he is experiencing the same symptoms: piercing headaches, sore eyes, nosebleeds and maggots under the skin. In what turns into a race against time, Riley tries to track down Patient Zero in the hope of finding a cure and preventing an epidemic. Eric England who wrote and directed the first film had no part in this follow-up and maybe that's why it simply isn't as good. Everything memorable about the original is repeated here to lesser effect: there's a limit to how many times one wants to see a character stare into a bathroom mirror and pull body parts off. The new stuff, presumably intended to open things out – police investigation, backstory, gunplay – doesn't work at all. There are plot holes and contrivances galore and the frankly ridiculous big finish rounds things off. If you haven't seen the original, it won't seem quite as bad; but, really, it is to the first film what *Book of Shadows* is to *The Blair Witch Project*: inferior in every aspect and completely unnecessary. **DK** **3/10**



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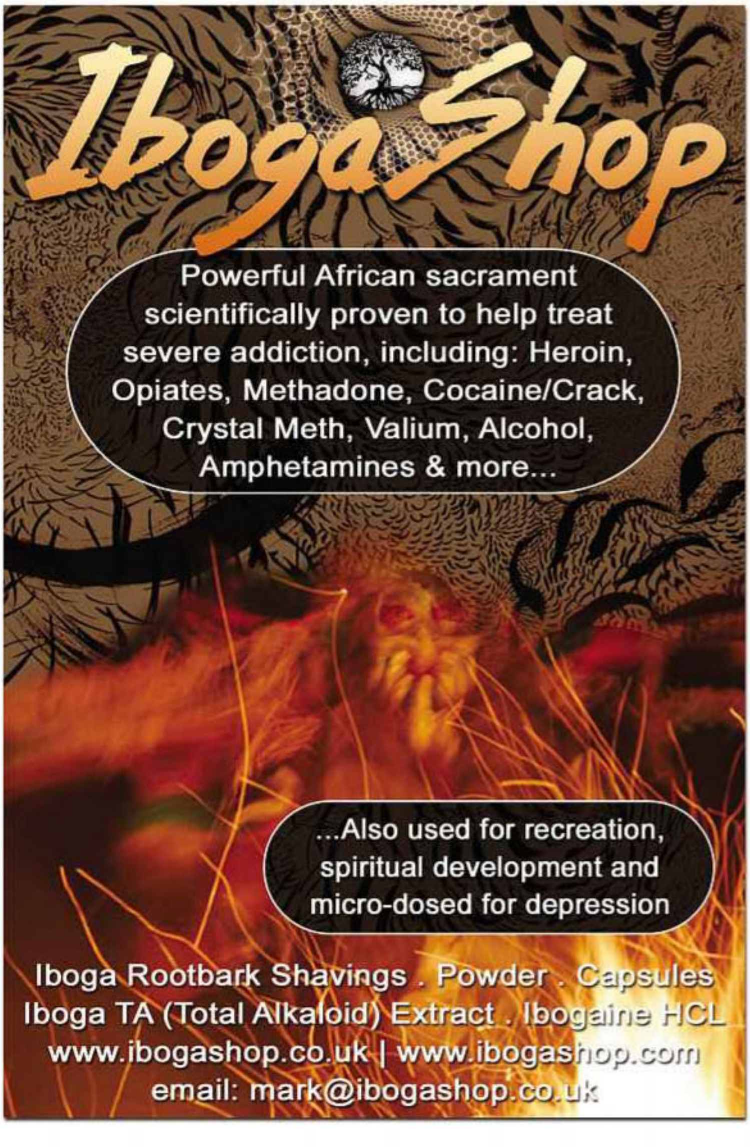

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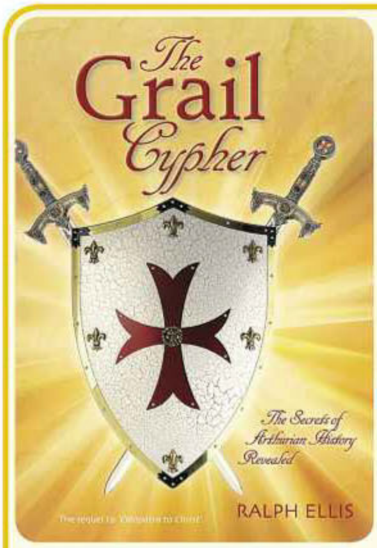
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Dear FT...

letters

Pagan ritual

While reading Rob Gandy's excellent article on the Horn Dance [**FT336:26-33**], I was reminded of something that has long itched at the back of my mind. I wonder if any readers can help me scratch said itch.

I clearly remember (or *seem* to remember) reading about a strange (pagan?) holiday ritual in rural England in the 17th century (and doubtless at other times). I say 17th century because I remember (or *seem* to remember) reading about this ritual in *Wife To Mr Milton* by Robert Graves; but when I consult that most entertaining book I cannot find it there. Maybe it was another Graves book… Anyway: as I remember it, men in villages would dress as women, blacken their faces and silently go from house to house with brooms (doors had to be open to allow these guys free entrance and exit) where they would madly sweep the floors while making a loud buzzing sound like a swarm of bees. I vaguely remember one gave them food to get them out of the house (and drink, I suppose).

Is this familiar to anyone, or am I finally losing it? I can't have imagined this. I'm not nearly clever enough for that.

Paul Giamatti
Brooklyn, New York

Lovecraft's version

Regarding the feature on the Oliver Lerch disappearance [**FT335:42-47**], the motif has also been used by HP Lovecraft in his *The Colour Out of Space* (1927). After environmental changes following the crash of a meteor in the hills near Arkham, several of the witnesses go insane and some vanish. Among them is a farmer's boy, Merwin. "[L]ittle Merwin… was gone. He had gone out late at night with a lantern and pail for water, and had never come back… There had been a frantic shriek from the yard then, but before the father could get to the door the boy was gone. There was no glow from the lantern he had taken, and of the child himself no trace. At the time Nahum thought the lantern and pail were gone too; but when dawn came, and the man had plodded back from his all-night search of the woods and fields, he had found some very curious things near the well. There was a crushed and apparently somewhat melted mass of iron which had certainly been the lantern; while a bent handle and twisted iron hoops beside it, both half-fused, seemed to hint at the remnants of the pail. That was all."

While we don't know whether or not Lovecraft was influenced by the other writers mentioned by Theo Paijmans and Chris Aubeck, all the stories share the basic event: a young man going to a well and vanishing completely. Only in Lovecraft's story, the boy's remains are later discovered deep in the well, and in a none too good state!

Ulrich Magin
Hennef, Germany

Reader survey

Reading about the YouGov survey of *FT* readers [**FT337:2**] took me back to a very wild and windy West Walian afternoon when I completed a YouGov survey (there's not that much to do when the weather comes in). With a few notable exceptions (Greene King IPA, the *Guardian* and Rammstein), I am what probably passes as your average *FT* reader – a badge of honour made even sweeter as you think we all sound a bit weird, which confirms what my ex always said about me. It's official and endorsed by *FT* – I am a weirdo!

Tania Thomas
By email

Black widow spiders

Your report 'Spider Spotlight' [**FT337:22-23**], which focused mainly on dangerous or scary spider encounters in Great Britain, claimed that American black widow spiders are "routinely deadly" – but in fact there has not been a single death in the US linked to black widow envenomation since 1983. That sounds very non-routine to me. Black widows naturally flee from humans and do not attack unless they are cornered or treated exceedingly abusively. Even if bitten by a black widow, the result is likely to be minor. For one thing, the spider often fails to inject a large enough bolus of venom. Many who have been fanged by a black widow benefit from washing the area with warm water and soap. Some victims must be admitted to hospital to get fluids and painkillers. Studies have recently shown that black widow antivenin is not effective at aiding healing or decreasing pain. Local tissue necrosis may occur in severe cases, but amputation or permanent lack of function is very, very rare, as long as the bite victim goes to hospital at the first signs of significant skin or muscle involvement or vomiting. People certainly can die from black widow envenomation, especially if allergic to the venom, but death is actually quite rare by any standard (a small fraction of one per cent of those envenomated).

John Aho
North Mankato, Minnesota

Ether & dark matter

Mike Harding illustrates a problem with the science establishment that I think should have its own course in school [**FT336:72-73**]. What is the difference between dark matter and the ether? One is acceptable and one is not; but what is the actual difference?

Kurt Lothman
Houston, Texas

Toynbee tiles

Further to Richard Porter's letter regarding seeing a "Toynbee Tile" in New York [**FT337:72**], this is the subject of a most excellent 2011 documentary directed by Jon Foy called *Resurrect Dead: The Mystery of the Toynbee Tiles*. "An urban mystery unfurls as one man pieces together the surreal meaning of hundreds of cryptic tiled messages that have been appearing in city streets across the U.S. and South America." You can watch it here: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1787791/

Simon Bickerdike
By email

Entombed blackbird

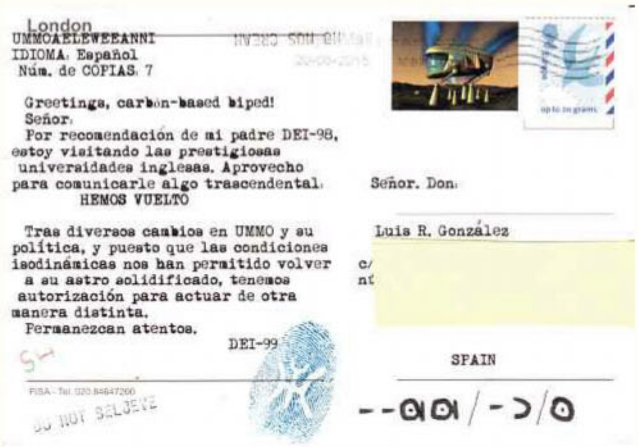
The following appeared on *Guardian Streetlife* on 16 January 2016, during a conversation about replacement windows. "Funny thing happened when the guys ripped out the original frames, they found a large black bird inside the wooden frame. It was too big not to notice when they did the original woodwork for the windows… must have been inside the frame for about 80+ years." Has anybody ever heard of anything like this, or is it a variation on the kipper in the curtain pole?

Isobel Horsburgh
East Boldon, Tyne & Wear

Editor's note: A more telling comparison might be the witch bottles and desiccated cats found concealed behind walls and fireplaces, or secreted in roof cavities, to ward off misfortune. Oh, and I heard the wronged wife's sweet revenge was prawns in the curtain pole. Same effect, I suppose.

IS THAT A MID-ATLANTIC ACCENT?

JOHN ROBERT DOCHERTY



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Luis R. González

[redacted]

SPAIN

UMMO strikes again!

On 20 August 2015, a mysterious hand dropped five postcards of Piccadilly Circus into the post box of King's College, Cambridge. They were addressed to ufologists in Spain, Italy and Argentina and the stamp showed a NOIA UEWA (a walking machine used by the Ummites). The text (in Spanish, except for a curious greeting taken from the title of a collection of Arthur C Clarke's essays) made clear reference to Dr Dominguez's ideas as described in the recent *FT* article about the UMMO affair [**FT336:58-59**], even including two initials (SH) formed with coloured segments that could be interpreted as the UMMO sign. Not by chance, King's College was the alma mater of Stephen Hawking.

There were two big revelations. The Ummites have returned to our planet and, after some political changes on their world, are allowed to behave differently. Those political changes were shown by the use of a slightly different emblem, seen both in the customary fingerprint and on the side of the walking machine on the stamp. Finally, there was a date in Ummite digits. Translated, it read as 8 December 2015. The old UMMO mantra was still included: "Do not believe" (apparently they forgot the "us").

Two weeks later, a second wave of postcards was sent on the same day from Baltimore (Maryland), Bergen in Norway, and Barcelona in Spain. The message in Spanish was the same as before but it was preceded by a sentence in the original language of each country, each one different and referring to a peculiar detail of UMMO lore. The local stamp included the same NOIA UEWA, but the emblem on it and on the fingerprint was a different colour for each country.

A third batch of postcards was posted in Toulouse, France, in October. This time the stamp was facing the other way, the printed message was clearly done with an old typewriter, and the image apparently showed the real location of the original Ummite base – not underground but underwater!

By this time, the UFO scene in Spain and France was a hotbed of rumours. The fact that the original cards had been posted in England – and coincided with the arrival on the newsstands of an issue of *FT* that happened to discuss several UFO hoaxes – fuelled the idea of a British prank. Others blamed different Spanish ufologists, and one or two of those who had received the postcards were even suspected. Then, on Hallowe'en, someone confessed to the prank as news about a UFO-themed novel began to circulate on the Internet.

Yes, I was the culprit. Originally, it was intended as a joke played on some friends to call their attention to my new novel. Unfortunately, one of them leaked the news to the Spanish ufological community and everything exploded. Seeing some of the bizarre theories circulating, I decided to keep silent until the date mentioned in the cards – the estimated publication date of my novel, *UMMO – Historia de una obsesión (UMMO – History of an obsession).*

I even joined in the search for clues, and in fact contributed to it. The most serendipitous and amazing find has been an obscure TV programme called *Postcards from Barcelona* that aired in November 1955 in the USA. Its plot concerned humans receiving postcards containing astounding scientific revelations from Barcelona (!) by alien visitors, 10 years *before* the UMMO affair started in Spain. According to the credits, the script was written by Sloan Nibley based on a story by Tom Gries.

In the end, modern publishing strategies led to an earlier-than-planned mention of my novel on the Internet, forcing a premature confession from me – and vitriolic attacks from the believers!

Luis R Gonzalez
Malaga, Spain

PICCADILLY CIRCUS
LONDON

Pull the other one

While at home in England for Christmas, I heard what sounds like a classic urban legend told to me as fact: when Hitler's platoon was captured in World War I and were about to be executed, a young English soldier stepped in to stop the imminent slaughter. Hitler survived, history unfolded. Upon entering Hitler's bunker in Berlin at the end of World War II, Allied soldiers found on his office wall a picture of this English soldier, acting as a reminder of what he did.

Many questions spring to mind. How did the Allied soldiers know who it was in the photo? How did Hitler come to have a photo of the soldier anyway? Did Hitler's captors allow him to take a snap? Would British soldiers in World War 1 have executed an entire platoon? Were there not rules of engagement then?

Duncan Kaiser
By email

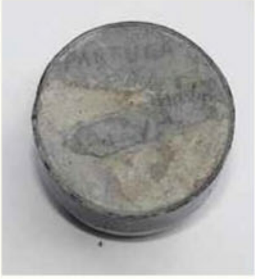
Lure of the dominant

I was surprised there was no mention of either Edgar Allan Poe or Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) in Maria J Perez Cuervo's enjoyable 'The Return of Gothic Romance' [**FT337:32-39**], especially since the James tale has a female protagonist, the unnamed governess who narrates most of the story. And while most if not all of Poe's protagonists were male, Poe's bleak vision, with its mouldering isolated castles, mad incestuous families and diverse supernatural motifs certainly cast a huge shadow over the 20th century Gothic novel. Reversing the trends of the traditional Gothic, however, it is the women, not the men, who have the upper hand throughout Poe's work.

I'd also like to draw your attention to the 32 *Dark Shadow* novels published by Paperback Library and written by male author WED Ross between 1966 and 1972 under the pseudonym Marilyn Ross. Based on the popular television Gothic soap opera, there were also novelisations of the feature films *House of Dark Shadows* (1970) and *Night of Dark Shadows* (1971). Though the covers of the first few books in the sequence featured stereotypical paintings of a woman fleeing a castle or mansion at night, as the programme became an afternoon television craze with the introduction of Barnabas Collins (Jonathan Frid) in 1967, Paperback Library traded in the painted covers for photographs of the cast, and the titles became more overt, such as *Barnabas Collins Versus the Warlock* (1969) and *Barnabas, Quentin and the Nightmare Assassin* (1970).

I found it interesting that the author believes that women "entering the paid workforce, fighting for equality, and struggling with sexual harassment" in the 1960s were drawn to Gothic Romance novels because they provided "escapism and quiet transgression". My view would be that perhaps those same working women were simply indulging their desire to be dominated by men in a "romantic" capacity. There's no denying that most women in classic Gothics were romantically, and therefore sexually, drawn to the dominant male figure of the work, whether Jane Eyre for Rochester, Cathy for Heathcliff, the second Mrs de Winter for Maxim in *Rebecca* (1938) or Betsey Connell (Frances Dee) for Paul Holland (Tom Conway) in RKO's *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Nancy Friday's *My Secret Garden: Women's Sexual Fantasies* (1973) was soon to appear, and certainly gave popular support to the idea that women, like men, have a very broad range of sexual fantasies, including those involving masochism and domination.

Joseph Barnes
New York



A minor oopart

Fresh examples of out-of-place-artefacts (ooparts) are extremely scarce, so I'd like to share a possible oopart in my possession, albeit a very minor one. I was raised at the edge of Clumber Park in Nottinghamshire, and when walking in the forest there with my mum one morning I noticed something in the middle of the path: a small, old-fashioned cardboard display box containing a corroded, metal five-petalled flower pendant on a bed of cotton wool. The underside of the box bears the words "PARTULA" and (possibly) "Maslyn", then "Rasale" or "Ranale", written in pencil.

The spot where I found this object was remote from other houses except ours, although it was fairly well frequented by visitors. Obviously someone dropped it – but what were they doing walking in the woods carrying it? Why keep a cheap piece of corroded jewellery in this box? More curious still is how the cardboard box, although seemingly decades old, was in fairly good condition when the pendant seems to have been exposed to the elements for a long time. Either item on its own would not be that remarkable, yet together they make no sense.

Could the box have once been for specimens? Partula is a genus of tropical land snails from Polynesia, so did it previously contain one such snail? The first study of these creatures was made by Henry Edward Crampton (1875-1956) of Columbia University, and most types are now either extinct or critically endangered. Another Partula expert, the geneticist Professor Bryan Clarke (1932-2014), worked at the University of Nottingham from 1971, which gives a Nottinghamshire link in the right timeframe as the finding. So just maybe there's the slightest possibility that he dropped the object when taking out his handkerchief, except that the box and the pendant both seem antique and from Crampton's era. And of course, there is no Partula snail. Granted how this is nowhere in the same league as the "wristwatch in an ancient Chinese tomb"-type of oopart that makes the headlines [**FT249:19**], it is nevertheless real, and I'd welcome any other ideas about it.

Jerry Glover
Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire

Rachel's Challenge

Sitting down in the local high school auditorium to cover an event for the local newspaper, I didn't expect to be confronted by fortean themes – but that's what happened when I went to a "Rachel's Challenge" presentation recently. The programme, offered to grade school children across the United States, focuses on the life and writings of Rachel Joy Scott, the first victim of the Columbine Shootings in 1999. Rachel was not a typical teenage girl, according to the presentation, which focuses on teaching children how to be compassionate by presenting them with Rachel's story and five challenges.

I braced myself for an overflow of some sort of religious indoctrination, but it didn't happen. If Rachel's religion was mentioned, I missed it. Instead, the videos focused on her premonition that she would not live long and her determination to make a difference in the world. The premonition, which is emphasised heavily in the presentation I saw, led her to write about dying, including a poem in which she predicted the year of her death and another in which she predicted she would be a victim of homicide.

Having been a teenage girl myself, once, I can honestly say I wrote similar poetry that might have been taken as a premonition had I died. I fully expected not to get past my 27th birthday, but I'm over 40 now. Whether or not Rachel's writings were just teenage angst is hard to tell. Her determination to make a difference in the world is also presented as an amazing thing. What I saw, from my sceptical viewpoint, was a girl who put on a cheerful face and tried as hard as she could to be a good person. Then there was one final story about her father getting a strange call soon after her funeral. The man said he'd been haunted by an image of Rachel's eyes dripping tears onto something growing out of the ground, and wanted to know if the father had any inkling what the vision was about. The father thought the man was nuts, but politely said he didn't know, sorry.

Some weeks after the shooting, the police released Rachel's backpack to her family. Her father found Rachel's last diary, and immediately turned to the final entries to find out what his daughter's thoughts had been on her last day. What he found was a drawing, which they showed at the presentation, of a pair of eyes crying. The tears flow down into a rose growing up from the bottom of the page. Although the lead up to the image was the strikingly fortean story about the man who called, the presentation didn't really follow up on that angle, choosing instead to focus on a teacher who saw Rachel drawing the image the day of the shooting. In addition, they counted the number of tears in the image and noted that it was the same as the number of victims who were killed. Rachel's Challenge has a website at rachelschallenge.org that appears to have many of the videos shown during the presentation, although I didn't spot the "eyes crying on a rose" one.

Laura Gjovaag
Sunnyside, Washington

By Jove!

I very much enjoyed your column on "Scrambling, shrieking, swearing" in bygone times [Classical Corner 196, which had lost its title during production, 'Expletives not deleted'], although I was a little disappointed to note that my favourite insult, "You filth gorged privy maggot", was omitted. Ah, the good old days!

Chris Patterson
London

letters

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Simulacra corner

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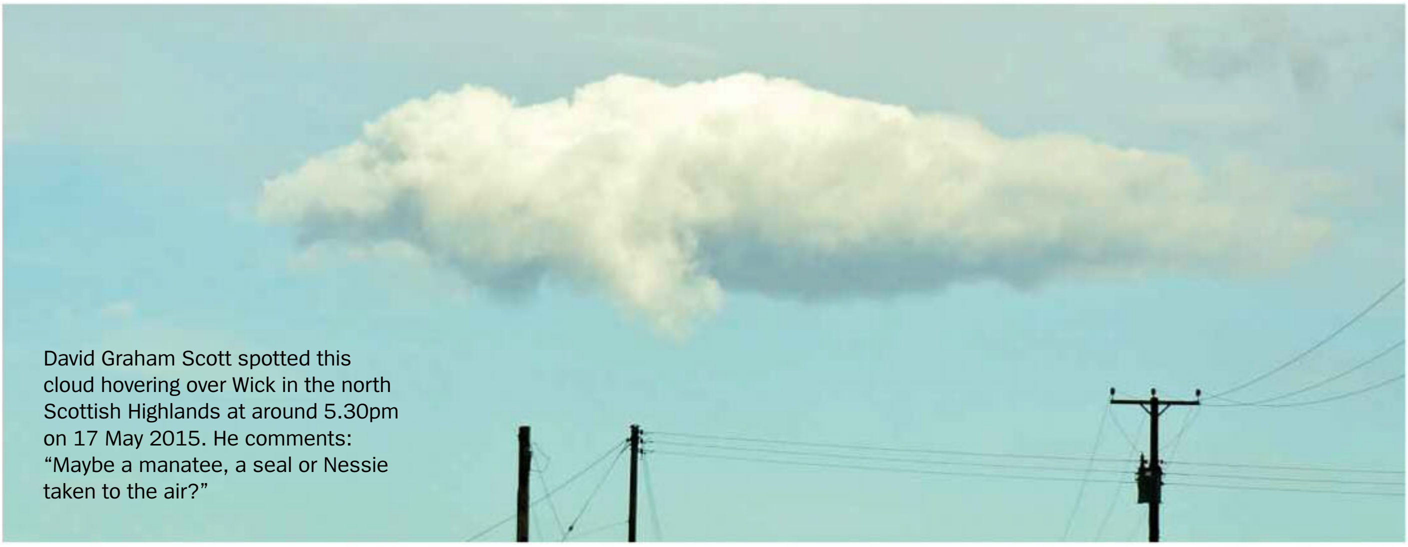
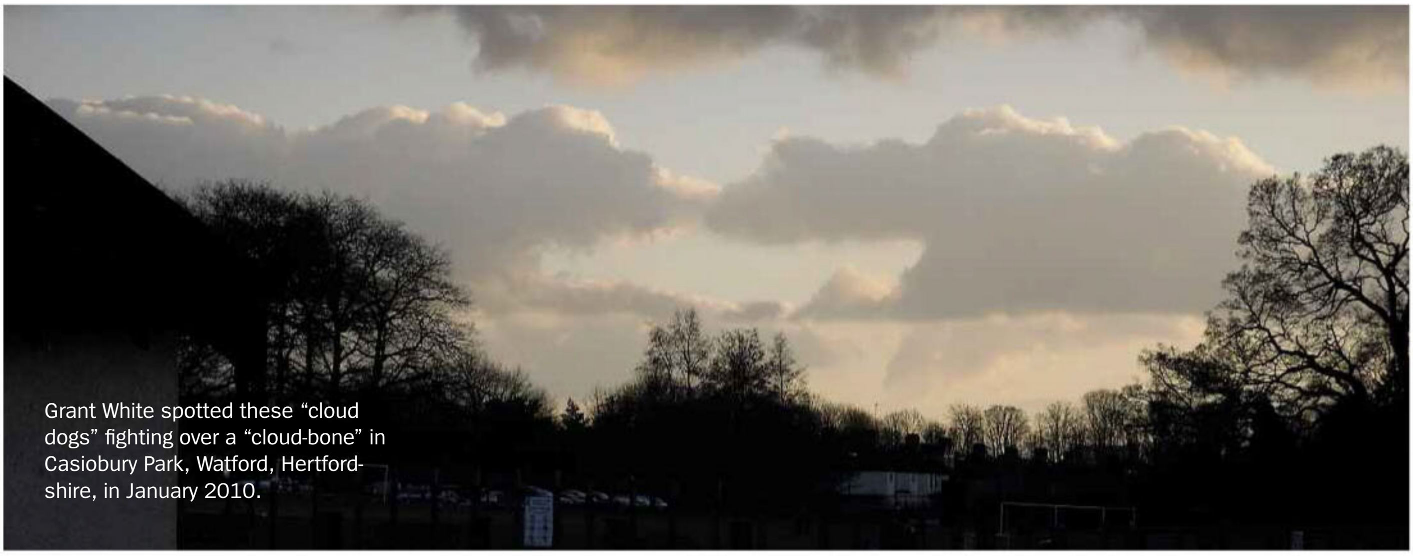
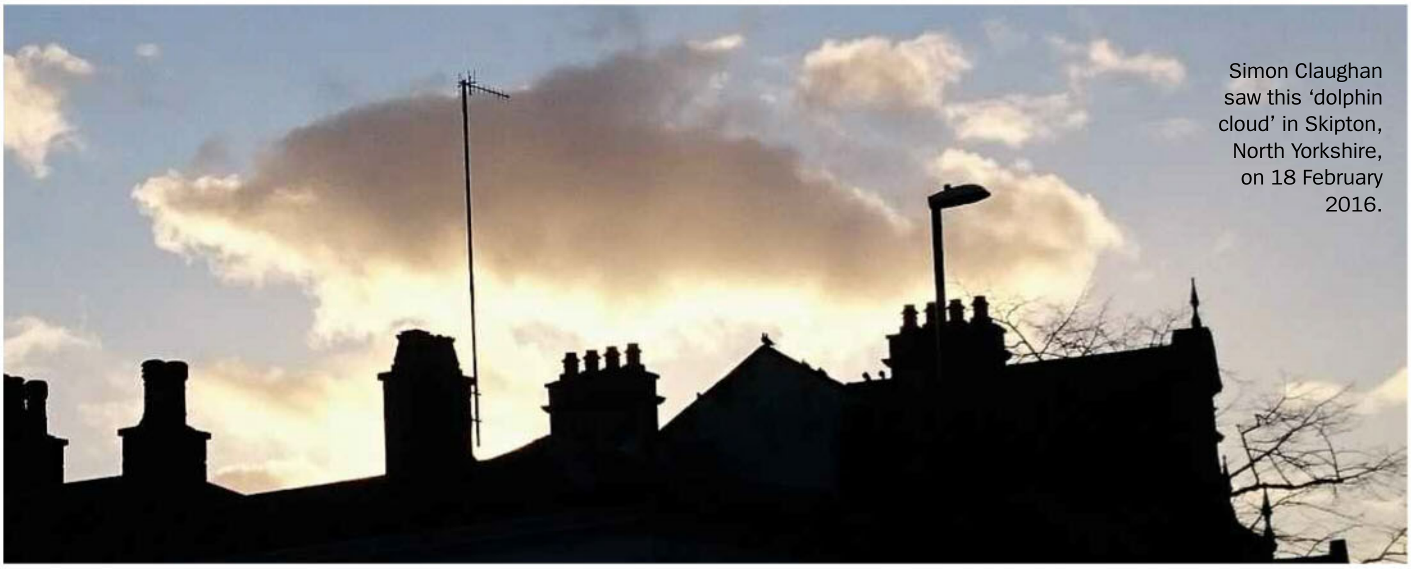


David Graham Scott spotted this cloud hovering over Wick in the north Scottish Highlands at around 5.30pm on 17 May 2015. He comments: "Maybe a manatee, a seal or Nessie taken to the air?"



Grant White spotted these "cloud dogs" fighting over a "cloud-bone" in Casiobury Park, Watford, Hertfordshire, in January 2010.



Simon Claughan saw this 'dolphin cloud' in Skipton, North Yorkshire, on 18 February 2016.

it happened to me...

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The King and I

In back issues of *FT* I've come across several letters from correspondents describing how words spoken on the radio correspond to words they were writing. Sceptics will 'explain' this by invoking statistics, something I'd be willing to go along with if it hadn't been for the fact that these experiences very clearly cluster. In some periods they are much more frequent than in others. This may of course depend on other factors, such as my mental receptiveness, or the well known fact that random occurrences by the very nature of randomness *do* cluster – if they were evenly spaced, they wouldn't be random. Still, I think this is inadequate to explain why these coincidences are normally relatively rare, while in some periods they may happen several times a day.

Another strange factor is that it specifically seems to concern writing, not speaking or thinking. (As I'm usually alone when the radio is on, this explains the speaking. But I am *thinking* all the time.) This morning I had a new slant on this. I had been dreaming about the late King Olav of Norway, who died in 1991 (pictured above). To my knowledge, I have never dreamt about him before. The contents of the dream are irrelevant, but we were unusually chummy (it seems I was there in some official position or other). After I woke up, I turned on the lights, the PC and the radio, and did all the other things one does upon rising. While I was busy with this, I suddenly remembered the dream, and said to myself: "Gee, I must write down that dream about the..."

"... king," the radio says. This came with no kind of build-up, in other words my thoughts could not have been triggered by the people on the radio chatting about the monarchy in general.

A related topic that is often explained by statistics is precognitive dreams. I very seldom have dreams that can remotely be construed as being precognitive. However, many years ago – late 1970s or early 1980s, when I would be about 25 – I went through a period when I had them almost daily. It wasn't quite Jeane Dixon; it would be only a word somebody said or some object I saw, but it was very distinctive.

Another thing – there seems to be a particular kind of dream where you are in very close contact with a well-known person. I know I've had this about Ronald Reagan, Vladimir Putin and several other people I don't remember at the moment. Now, the King. These dreams have some common factors: they are extraordinarily lifelike; there is an extremely intimate atmosphere in them, as if this person were your best friend; and to my knowledge, they happen only once (whereas many other dreams are recurring). The lifelikeness could be explained by modern media, which bombards us with images and videos of these people all the time. The 'intimacy' could likewise be explained by their omnipresence in the media. Still, there is a particular flavour to these dreams I can't quite explain – they seem to be *more* lifelike than when I dream about friends and family, which is counterintuitive.

Nils Erik Grande
Oslo, Norway

Stockport hitch-hiker

One night in the late 1980s or early 1990s, I was riding my motorbike home from a concert in Manchester along the A6. I wasn't having fun: I was tired, it was dark and cold, the road surface was greasy and treacherous, and there was a car behind me whose erratic driving was causing me concern. I wasn't idly dreaming about the supernatural, nor was I bored enough to self-hypnotise; rather I was concentrating intently on the immediate business of not dying.

As I came down the long hill towards Stockport town centre, I saw a figure on the left-hand pavement, just near the big Debenhams store. I couldn't see much detail, but it looked like a slim girl, with dark, straight shoulder-length hair, wearing a short jacket and trousers, and holding what appeared to be a large handbag. As I approach, she walked to the kerb and stuck her thumb out. People don't usually thumb lifts from motorcyclists, so I assumed she was thumbing the car behind me and didn't slow down. However, when I was very close to her, I realised that what I'd taken to be a bag was actually a motorcycle helmet, held upside down by its strap, and that it might be me she was thumbing after all.

Given that I was now very close to her, I thought about the slippery road surface and the dubious car driver and decided not to jump on the brakes and stop next to her, but instead to run through the traffic lights at the bottom of the hill and pull into the bus lay-by just the other side, where the car could pass me safely. When I stopped in the lay-by and looked back over my shoulder, I couldn't see her anymore, so I beeped the horn and revved the engine several times to attract her attention. Unfortunately, the only attention this attracted was from some drunks staggering across Mersey Square, which made me unwilling to park the bike and walk back to where she'd been standing.

Her disappearance didn't strike me as "spooky" at the time. Although the car hadn't stopped to pick her up, there was a bus shelter, a recessed doorway and several other bits of street furniture that could have been concealing her from my view. Then another thought struck me: maybe she was waiting for a specific motorcyclist (her boyfriend, for example), she'd thumbed me in error, realised her mistake and was now hiding as a way of giving me the "brush off", rather than getting into an encounter with a strange man late at night. A little rude perhaps, but understandable if she was nervous. I waited a little longer, revved the engine a few more times, then gave up and rode home.

I thought no more about this incident until a few years later, when I was browsing in a bookshop and picked up a book of local ghost stories. Flicking through it at random, I noticed a drawing of a motorcyclist, so I read the associated story. I seemed that this guy had actually picked up a girl hitchhiker of similar appearance, in almost exactly the same place as my "near-miss". She'd given him directions to a nearby house, but when he got there, there was nobody on the pillion. Thinking that she'd fallen off, he'd retraced his route back to the point where he was sure she was still on board, but there was no sign of her. When he returned to the house and knocked on the door, it was opened by an elderly couple who insisted he come in and sit down, before explaining to him that the only girl of that appearance who'd lived there had been their daughter who'd died in a motorcycle accident many years previously. He was not the first agitated young man, they said, to arrive at their door with a similar story.

Unfortunately, the author of the book had anonymised the story at the rider's insistence, so there were no names, dates or addresses to check. [In any case, it conforms to a well known urban legend – Editor.] I was short of money at the time and elected not to buy the book, and I don't keep any sort of diary, so I can't even be certain of years, let alone dates. It's only the make and model of bike I was riding that lets me establish the timeframe of my encounter. I know that both stories are 'weak', but it's still interesting that there are two similar stories from the same very specific area.

Harold Weaver Smith
Offerton, Greater Manchester

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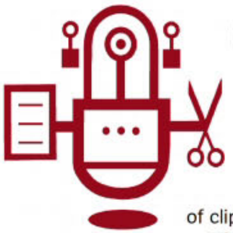

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Why Fortean?

Fortean Times is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

From the viewpoint of mainstream science, its function is elegantly stated in a line from Enid Welsford's book on the mediæval fool: "The Fool does not lead a revolt against the Law; he lures us into a region of the spirit where... the writ does not run."

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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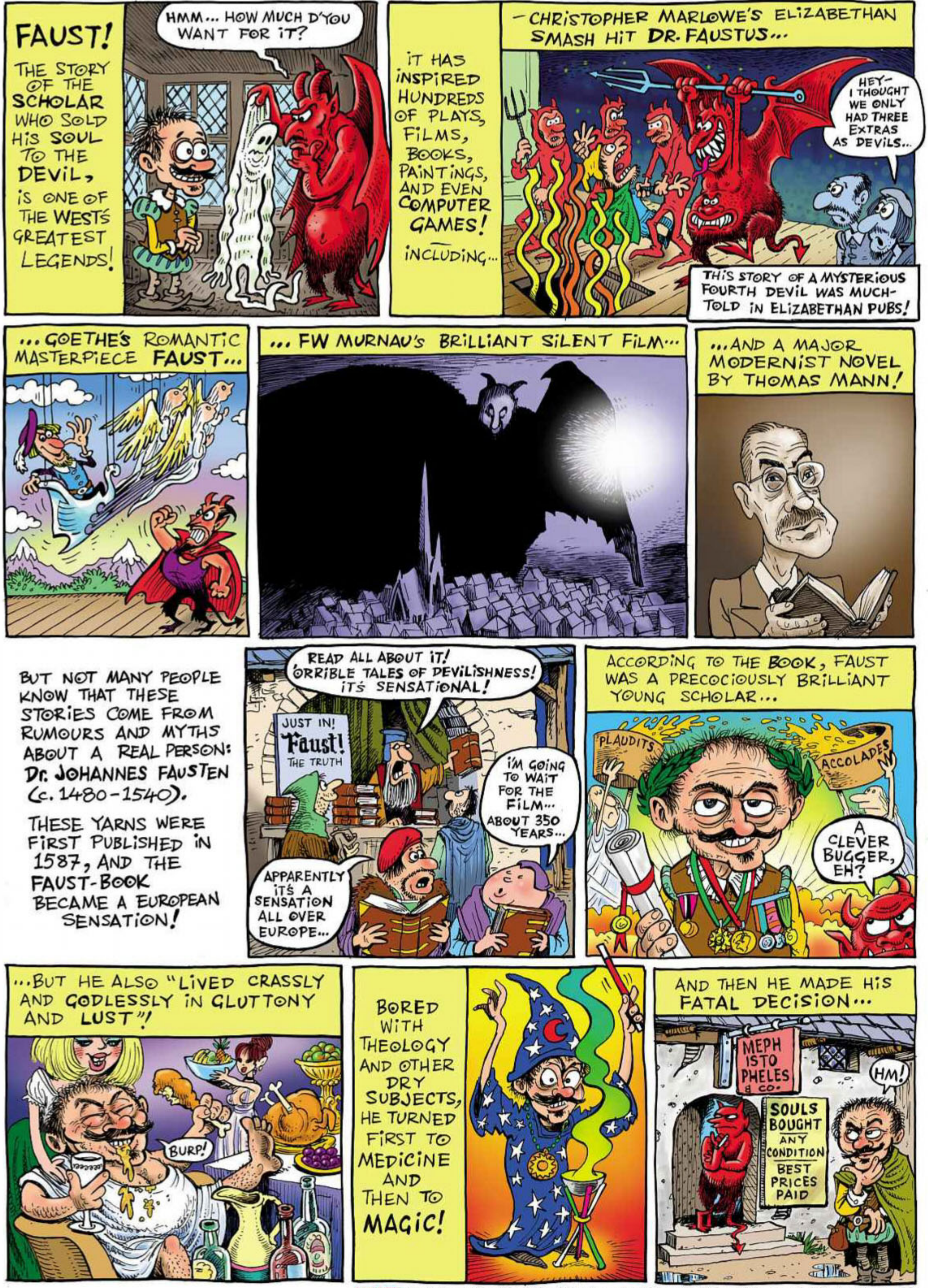
PHENOMENOMIX FAUST PART 1

HUNT EMERSON and KEVIN JACKSON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ON SALE 28 APR 2016

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

Devoted couples often seem to make an exit within hours or days of each other, lending weight to the notion that death can be a matter of willpower. [For earlier examples, see FT275:25.] Harry and Mavis Stevenson married in 1949 and were an inseparable couple for 65 years. When Mavis's health deteriorated, Harry – sometime a Royal Marine Commando and D-Day veteran – moved into a Derby care home to be with her. Despite his frailty, he was in better health than his wife, but when she died at 10.50am on 3 November 2014, 48 hours after her 89th birthday, he followed her less than 10 minutes later. He was 88. Their nephew Stephen Cresswell said: "The staff told Harry very gently that she had passed away and said he shed two or three tears. Then they tended to Mavis and the next time they looked over at Harry, he was gone. He was lying next to her in a separate bed at the time. They shared a room at the home and the staff had pushed the beds together the night before. They told me he was holding her hand all that final night." ***D.Mail, D.Telegraph, 17 Nov 2014.***

A former prisoner of war, who survived building the Burma railway, and his wife of 76 years, died within hours of each other on their wedding anniversary, 29 July 2014. Clifford Hartland died aged 101 and 14 hours later his wife Marjorie, 97, passed away from "a broken heart" in the rest home where they lived together in Coventry. The couple, who fell in love at first sight on meeting in Cardiff, married on 5 August 1938. "They never ever argued," said their daughter Christine. "When they'd go to a restaurant, dad would eat the same thing mum ordered. They loved dancing together, and they loved singing." For three years during WWII, Clifford was missing, presumed dead, in the jungle, but his wife refused to give up hope. He was one of only four survivors from the 7th Coast Regiment Royal Artillery, captured by the Japanese and forced into hard labour. *D.Telegraph, Metro, Western Mail, 12 Aug 2014.*

Joan and Walter Moss married in 1943 as teenage sweethearts. Walter, 19, took part in the D-Day landings and fought through France and Germany with his tank regiment. After WWII, the couple had two children and were rarely apart during their 72 years of marriage. Joan cared for Walter when he developed dementia, determined they should stay together in their home in Salford, Greater Manchester; but they both fell seriously ill at the same time with Joan suffering from a collapsed lung. They both died from pneumonia at Salford Royal Hospital on 28 April 2015, Joan at 6am and Walter an hour later, not knowing his wife had already died. ***D.Express, 9 May 2015.***

Last summer, followers of the Jain faith petitioned India's Supreme Court for the continued right to starve themselves to death as a religious freedom. Jainism dates back to the sixth century BC, and Jain monks lead a life of extreme austerity and renunciation – which includes the wearing of masks over their mouths to avoid harming microbes or insects by inhaling them. *Sallekhana* or *santhara* is a controversial religious practice in which a Jain stops eating with the intention of preparing for death – an observance that can last up to 12 years. It is seen as the ultimate way to expunge all sins and karma, and obtain *moksha* (liberation of the soul from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth). There are between four and six million Jains in India, mostly in the states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka. On average, 240 Jains practise *santhara* until death each year.

"For us death is full of excitement," a Jain woman monk told William Dalrymple in his book *Nine Lives*. "You embrace sallekhana not out of despair with your old life, but to gain and attain something new. It's just as exciting as visiting a new landscape or a new country: we feel excited at a new life, full of possibilities." The monk insisted it was not suicide. "It is quite different. Suicide is a great sin, the result of despair. But sallekhana is a triumph over death, an expression of hope... With suicide, death is full of pain and suffering. But sallekhana is a beautiful thing. There is no distress or cruelty."

However, on 10 August 2015, a legal ruling begged to differ. The high court in Rajasthan, responding to a 2006 public interest petition by lawyer and human rights activist Nikhil Soni, ruled that the authorities should treat the centuries-old practice as attempted suicide, making it punishable under section 306 and 309 (Abetment of Suicide) of the Indian Penal Code. Furthermore, it was held to be a breach of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life. The judges ruled that no religious practice, whether essential or non-essential or voluntary, could permit taking one's own life. Soni feared that the elderly could be coerced into *santhara* by relatives who saw them as a financial burden – an argument against euthanasia familiar in the West.

On 24 August, members of the Jain community held a peaceful protest all over India against the ban on *santhara*, and on 31 August the Supreme Court of India stayed the Rajasthan decision and lifted the ban. *Santhara* "is neither self-destruction; nor it is a forced death," said Poonam Chand Bhandari, a Jain lawyer. "Death is inevitable; it is a universal truth. In the case of *santhara*, there is a spiritual purpose – it is for self-purification, for self-realisation, and for the uplift of soul... it does not come under the domain of the law." However, the vow of *santhara* cannot be taken by a layperson on his/her own without the permission of a monk. *BBC News, 21 Aug; D.Telegraph, 28 Aug; Sunday Times, 30 Aug; Indian Express, 2 Sept 2015.*

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Jane Isaac, Northamptonshire

"As a result of my cricket articles, I have been elected into The Cricket Writers Club – an organisation that counts experienced journalists among its members. One of the perks of this membership is a press card that gives me entry into all of England's cricket stadium press boxes."
Martin Read, West Sussex

"I chose to sign with Ammonite Press, who had a reputation for producing high quality art and photography books."
Sarah Plater, Buckinghamshire

"When I first saw my words in print it was life changing. Someone else had read my work, believed in it, paid for it, and put it out there for others to see. As more articles made it to press, my confidence grew and I found I wanted to inject some of myself into my writing. At the time of writing this I have received £1,197 for my work."
Kris Roberts, Somerset

Being a writer can offer you a second income, extra spending money or it can even be a full-time career. It's your choice. But whatever your writing ambitions, we have a course that will help you to achieve them.

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